

ANCIENT BIBLE COMMENTARIES IN ENGLISH

Homilies on Ecclesiastes by St. Gregory of Nyssa

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of Nyssa**

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Introduction

The book of Ecclesiastes occupies a unique position in the Bible due to its prevalent sense of pessimism and absence of God's intervention in our world. In fact, the all-pervading mood of a God remote from our human condition sets the tone for Ecclesiastes which seems incongruent with the other books of the Old Testament. It contains reflections more philosophical in nature rather than a testimony of belief which we would normally associate with the Hebrew scriptural tradition. For the traditional author, Ecclesiastes, God is the inscrutable originator of the world who determines the fate of humankind. Just as the natural world is in constant movement minus the presence of real change, so the human expenditure of energy comes to naught; despite the fact that reason leaves us baffled, the author affirms that life is worth living with all its limitations.⁽¹⁾

It is Ecclesiastes' sharply critical attitude towards human conduct and the instability of earthly existence that has caught the attention of that great Cappadocian bishop, Gregory of Nyssa (c.335-c.395), who composed his own commentary on this book. He takes up the task by subjecting the book of Ecclesiastes to exhaustive analysis to the third chapter, verse thirteen. Gregory attempts to explore the book's meaning and bearing upon Christian faith and conduct, for Ecclesiastes reveals a profound gulf between its dominant motif, "vanity of vanities," and Christian hope as presented in the Gospel. However, we must acknowledge that no book of the Old Testament so challenges Christian faith for a response to the questions it asks which are as old as our search for life's meaning. Even a cursory reading both of the book of Ecclesiastes and Gregory of Nyssa's commentary upon it show the fundamental theme of vanity, another word for the transitory character of this world. The phrase "vanity of vanities" does not condemn creation but simply our misuse of what God had entrusted to our guardianship. As Gregory's **On Virginity** briefly says, the outcome of our misuse of the patrimony entrusted to us is the illusion that we are masters of ourselves and of the earth. Two passages may be compared to illustrate this point: The text [Ecclesiastes] says that appearances are not simply vain; rather, they are characterized by a special kind of vanity as if someone were claimed to be more dead than the dead and more lifeless than the lifeless. Any exaggeration is out of place here, yet it serves to clarify a point. Just as we employ the phrase "service of works" and "holy of holies" to represent something outstanding, so does "vanity of vanities" demonstrate the incomparable excess of vanity. (**Commentary on Ecclesiastes**, J.283) The earth, says Ecclesiastes, abides forever and ministers to every generation: first one, then another which succeeds it. However, even though men are scarcely their own masters, they are brought into life without knowing it by their Maker's will. Before they wish it, they are withdrawn from life; nevertheless, in their excessive vanity, they think that they are her lords and that they

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who are now born, now dying, rule that which remains continually. (**On Virginity**, J.270)

When a person begins to grow spiritually, he or she realizes that former ways of life and the world view resulting from them no longer suffice for a new manner of living which has come to birth. That is, what we once held dear is no longer considered to be so precious. The book of Ecclesiastes clearly provides expression for such a realization, and Gregory of Nyssa did not fail to consider the role Ecclesiastes would play in his scheme for the spiritual life. He saw it divided into three stages, an outline inherited from his illustrious predecessor, Origen of Alexandria: praktike theoria or "practical, applied" contemplation, phusike theoria or "physical" contemplation and theologia or "theology" which pertains to God proper. In Origen's scheme the book of Proverbs represents the first stage, the book of Ecclesiastes the second and the Song of Songs the third and final stage. Gregory himself speaks of the these three books of Solomon with reference to the three stages of spiritual growth at the beginning of his **Commentary on the Song of Songs**: The purpose of the book of Proverbs is to teach, while that of Ecclesiastes is to preach. The philosophy of the Song of Songs transcends both by its loftier doctrine (J.18). "For Gregory of Nyssa, Proverbs is the first way, Ecclesiastes is the second,⁽²⁾ and the Song of Songs is the third. That is, he re-arranges the scheme originally developed by Origen. The **Song Commentary** goes to relatively great lengths to demonstrate the role of Proverbs in the First Homily.⁽³⁾ In Gregory's view we see a need to be instructed in things spiritual before advancing to a realization that our former perceptions were subject to vanity. Despite this basic difference, both Origen and Gregory agree that the Song of Songs holds pre-eminence by reason of "its loftier doctrine."⁽⁴⁾

The bishop of Nyssa claims in Ecclesiastes that the sensible life usually associated with the phrase "vanity of vanities" can act as a vehicle to put us in contact with a transcendent reality not generally accessible to us.⁽⁵⁾ In Gregory's view, our very own thoughts are potential enemies, which are to be destroyed. For a passage related to this theme, refer to **Ecclesiastes**: As a result, many traitors from the crowd, that is, our thoughts, will be summoned to assist the spy. These traitors are the ones of whom the Lord says, "A man's foes shall be of his own household." He refers to the utterances of his heart which can defile him as we clearly learn from the Gospel. (J.431) Our perception of the everyday world which also engaged Ecclesiastes' attention as king over Israel needs to be transcended. For Gregory of Nyssa a prototype for transcendence is St. Paul who was transported into the third heaven (cf. 2Cor.12.2-4), the place of beatitude. Let us compare two passages which illustrate this: But these things pertain to life here below while Paul kept his eyes fixed on heaven. However, he was raised to the third heaven where Christ the head is. Paul had his eyes set there, rejoiced

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at the unutterable mysteries of paradise and gazed upon unseen, hidden realities which transcend both the senses and mind. (**Ecclesiastes**, J.359-60) Even if someone like St. Paul was initiated into the ineffable mysteries of paradise and heard words not to be spoken, any understanding of God remains unutterable. Paul himself says that such concepts are ineffable. (**Song of Songs**, J.86) This rapture⁽⁶⁾ into heaven lies in sharp contrast to both the Ecclesiastes' personal situation and the world about him. In his commentary upon **Ecclesiastes** Gregory views such rapture as the antidote to the cyclic nature of vanity. Later in his more mature work, the **Song Commentary**, Gregory does not abandon this insight but develops it in relation to the unsurpassable nuptial relationship between bride and bridegroom. The origin of our alienation from God depicted in **Ecclesiastes** is our initial incapacity of adequately attending to real truth by such a transcendental seizure. As J. Gaith has observed,⁽⁷⁾ our spirit is attracted to sensibility instead of being drawn upward as the following passage shows: It is difficult for us to comprehend the true good because we are preoccupied with sense criteria which constrict the beautiful by enjoyment and pleasure. Just as we cannot see the beauty in heaven when the sky is darkened, so the soul's eye cannot see virtue obscured by pleasure's mist. (**Ecclesiastes**, J.428)

The first of eight homilies in **Ecclesiastes** approach the theme of death from an ascetical point of view.⁽⁸⁾ While discussing the vanity of human existence, Gregory explains that we have two forms of life present in us according to the two-fold constitution of human nature, the visible and invisible. The former is given to man as a means to attain the latter, knowledge of Him Who is. As David Balas points out,⁽⁹⁾ the bishop of Nyssa gives a much longer treatment of the death of the soul: The living Word cannot be present in us (I mean the pure, invisible bridegroom who unites the soul to himself by incorruptibility and holiness), unless we remove the veil of flesh by the mortification of our bodies on earth. In this way we will open the door to the Word that he may enter and dwell with the soul. This is clear, not only from the Apostle's divine teachings, but from the bride herself. (**Song of Songs**, J.342-43) The divine power holds all things in existence⁽¹⁰⁾ by a cosmic harmony and permanence on a purely ontological level. There is no "physical contact," so to speak, between God and creation as Reinhard Hubner has demonstrated.⁽¹¹⁾ Yet the following passage from **Ecclesiastes** speaks of a smooth transition from this ontological connection with God to a moral and religious one which is necessary for a person to live virtuously: For it is better to guard the grace we have already found. One such example is a person who discovers faith and purity through purification, but it is more difficult to guard what we have found than to find what we did not have. Similarly, the time to seek is not limited to a fixed occasion; rather, one's entire life should be an opportunity [*kairos*] for seeking that good. And so we must carefully measure out the time to guard our entire life as that prophetic voice now says. (J.404-5) Such an

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ontological-moral connection with God in Gregory's writings does not occur in isolation; rather, it takes place within a sphere larger and more comprehensive than the individual person, the universal Church. This corporate body enables the individual to ratify his ontological-moral union with God, thereby giving him or her greater security in the truth than a person would be able to discover on his or her own. Within this Church we see sacraments, that is, those "physical" means to reach the "incorporeal" reality of Christ. In Gregory's eyes, the sacrament of penance plays a key role in the process: If the book of Ecclesiastes says that passion can prevent us from transgressions, we should consider the Church's teaching as expressed through the confession of sins because this practice arms the soul against falling by means of the shield of shame...so the shame caused by passion will instruct a person for this future life if he accuses himself and reveals the secrets of his memory. (**Ecclesiastes**, J.316-17) Once a person is established in virtue (arete) by the confession of personal sinfulness, he or she is then prepared to make contact with the consubstantiality of the Church's members with Christ.⁽¹²⁾ These members which constitute the "physical" body of Christ on earth form a whole, that is, humanity. It is in this relationship between individual members of the Church and Christ that soteriology and Christology converge.⁽¹³⁾ In other words, the Church functions not only as a koinonia between her members but an inward orientation towards her source, Christ the head: Why, then, does the head of a wise person have eyes? Does this mean that an analogy exists between members of the soul and the body? Just as the head presides over the entire body, so does the soul hold preeminence as the governing principle. (**Ecclesiastes**, J.357). Here Gregory uses the term hegemonikon⁽¹⁴⁾ with respect to the soul which functions as a governing or guiding principle for the body. Nevertheless, there is a need to show a connection between head and members, and the term which the bishop of Nyssa employs for such a connection is akolouthia, the relationship between two elements.⁽¹⁵⁾ The beauty of Gregory's theology and philosophy lies in the fact that he is able to synthesize the physical and spiritual constitution of an individual person, his relationship to others in a larger body (the Church) and the final orientation of this corporate body to an ultimate goal, Jesus Christ.⁽¹⁶⁾ The perfection of the body of Christ, the Church, is for the bishop of Nyssa an eschatological reality. In other words, the Church's perfection is attained by subjection (hupotaxis) of its members to the head, the subject of Gregory's treatise on First Corinthians 15.28. An image of the subjection of creation to Christ as head is related to a another concept of Gregory is fond, pleroma, as we see in the following passage: As a chorus looks to its leader, sailors to their pilot, and soldiers to their general, so do those in the assembly [pleroma, in the sense of fullness, a full body persons] of the Church look to Ecclesiastes. (**Ecclesiastes**, J.299) This text immediately continues with a statement from Ecclesiastes himself, "I have been king over Israel in Jerusalem" (1.12). Here the Church is constituted as the Logos which is permeated by the "first-born (Christ) of

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the common dough," an expression with roots in St. Paul (1Cor.5.6 & Gal.5.9) and may be seen in the context of the following two passages: The great Apostle Paul joins us as virgins to Christ and acts as an escort for the bride. He says that the clinging together of two persons in the union of one body is a great mystery of Christ's union with the Church...This could not have happened unless the Lord had appeared to us 'overshadowed' with a human body. (**Song of Songs**, J.108-109) However, from the entirety of human nature to which the divinity is mixed, the man constituted according to Christ is a kind of first fruits of the common dough [*phurama*]. It is through this [divinized] man that all mankind is joined to the divinity. (**A Treatise on First Corinthians 15.28**, PG#44.1313B) Hans Urs von Balthasar remarks⁽¹⁷⁾ that the "physical" unity of humankind as a whole forms an image which Christ assumes, not the individual members. However, this insight of the entire human race as one body does not exist theoretically as in a Platonic sense; when a person loosens the bond to his or her own ego-consciousness through the program of self-denial as set forth by the Church and her liturgical cycle (Advent, Christmas, Lent, Easter), he or she is then able through grace to realize the "mystery which is Christ in you, the hope of glory" (Col.1.27).

Gregory is fond of borrowing Stoic terminology for describing the union of Christ with humankind.⁽¹⁸⁾ Such vocabulary was originally used with reference to the created realm, the cosmos, and served to explain the inter-relationship of beings with each another. A passage from the **Commentary on Ecclesiastes** demonstrates this point well: [The text] shows that the universe is entirely consistent with itself, and its harmony [*harmonia*] does not admit the dissolution of created beings; instead, we have concord [*sumpnoia*] between them all. Neither is the universe severed from any of its parts but all things remain in their essence by the power [*dunamis*]⁽¹⁹⁾ of him who truly exists. (J.406) This passage forms part of an exegesis on the biblical text of Ecclesiastes 3.6, "a time (*kairos*) to seek, and a time to lose; a time to keep and a time to cast away." Heinrich Dorrie remarks⁽²⁰⁾ that this passage sees a union between Gregory's theology and cosmology in a Stoic context where creation is regarded as the expression of an artist. The source of such inspiration derives from Poseidonius.⁽²¹⁾ However, Gregory does not succumb to a pantheistic conception of our union with God and creation where no distinction is made between the respective parts. This is evident enough from a brief reading of his treatise on First Corinthians 15.28 where all things are oriented towards Christ as head, that is, they are given direction and purpose towards a predetermined goal. Similarly, Gregory's notion of our upward motion in knowledge and love of God is a directed movement going "from glory to glory," a phrase dear to Gregory which he borrowed from 2Cor.3.18. As the Greek text has it, we move "from glory into (*eis*) glory." Such movement is well expressed in the **Commentary on the Song of Songs**: Thus it is among persons advancing in virtue; being transformed from glory to

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glory, they do not always remain in the same character, but according to the degree of perfection established in each person, a different character will shine in their lives; a different one succeeds the other because of their increase in the good. (J.186) In his treatise *On Ecclesiastes* Gregory does not expressly touch upon this refined notion of movement which belongs to his more mature years. However, this work, like many of his others, does contain elements not yet explicitly formulated in his celebrated phrase "from glory to glory." For example, the following passage expresses concern over the negative aspects of change as opposed to the stability of unchanging Being or God: But the person guided through such temporalities to an understanding of him who exists and comprehends [God's] eternal nature through transitory reality and sees with his mind him who is always the same, beholds the true good and possesses what he sees, for knowledge is the possession of this good. (**Ecclesiastes**, J.285) This early work of Gregory cannot be expected to contain elements belonging to his maturity, yet we see a foundation on which he later builds his more sophisticated theology of constant transformation and growth in God. **Ecclesiastes** is concerned more with the fact that everything outside God ('the Being', J.406) consists of non-existence (anuparxia). However, God is absolute virtue, and the evil not belonging to him consists in non-existence or the deprivation of goodness. It exists insofar as we freely chose to separate ourselves from this good (God). Gregory employs the vivid expression of "sewing" ourselves onto God which works against the "rending" tendency of sin: Thus Paul knows the opportune time for cutting off the soiled part of the Church's garment and for sewing it back on again, that is, when we wash it from defilement through our repentance...Realize from what we are cut off and are always sewn on. Having been severed from heresy, we are sewn on to the true religion. (**Ecclesiastes**, J.408) As G. Christopher Stead has remarked in an article,⁽²²⁾ Gregory of Nyssa starts from the long-accepted principle that pure Being is identical with perfect Goodness and that evil, the absence of goodness, is somehow an absence of being. He describes evil as to me on, and uses such terms as anuparktos, anupostatos which suggest that evil is not really actual but a mere fiction: Evil cannot exist because it is of non-existence, and non-existence has no nature belonging to itself; nevertheless, vanity dominates those things which resemble it. (**Ecclesiastes**, J.300-301). It seems that for Gregory evil takes on substance in the person committing it through free will or choice (proairesis). This capacity of free will assumes the nature of sin and vice and is therefore subject to change of the most degrading kind. However, our ability to choose is man's most noble faculty. It is three-fold as Jerome Gaith states⁽²³⁾ in his important book which centers upon this aspect of Gregory's thought. Gaith continues to say that terms like musterion aduton (Holy of Holies) and apatheia (detachment or freedom from passion) express for Gregory the highest summit of moral liberty: the first term is hidden and sacred while the second is revealed in persons. Since a human being is endowed with free will, he or she can

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never be totally identified with his natural condition. In other words, a person has the capacity of being alienated from the downward pull of matter, dominated as it is by senses and appetites. The movement of proairesis is upward, a prefiguration (as in **Ecclesiastes**) of the mature teaching on our ascension "from glory to glory." The following passage demonstrates the "added on" nature of the senses in Gregory's thought: Since sense perception comes into being at our first birth, our minds await a return to mature age so that it might appear, however so little, in a person. And so the senses gradually dominate our minds and always have a strong affinity to any thought our minds put forth. We accordingly judge [krino, an exercise of our proairesis] good or bad whatever sense perception accepts or rejects. (**Ecclesiastes**, J.419) As this excerpt shows, human nature has the ability to make definitive choices when we open ourselves up to the world of appearances and our response to them. A person as image (eikon) of God is the expression of true liberty with its double aspect: the (active) capacity to destroy passions and the passivity of our interior disposition. This is a process which, according to Gaith,⁽²⁴⁾ is a dynamic synthesis of spiritualization and sublimation. Evil, on the contrary, is a dispersion and materialization by which our eikon loses intellectual liberty and spiritual liberty (pertaining to apatheia), thereby making us slaves to passion: Anything delighting the senses is considered good. If it were possible to discern for the mind what is good right from the beginning, we would not be subject to our irrational senses and be transformed into beasts reduced to slavery. Thus confusion results with regard to anything worthy of love in our nature along with that which we perceive as wrong. (**Ecclesiastes**, J.420) It seems that the origin of our alienation from the good is the initial incapacity of our intelligence to attend to the real truth by a transformation coming from God. And so, we are attracted to a sensibility and knowledge different from the one originally intended for us: Such is the nature of the good of which we partake, for by necessity it transforms anyone who shares it. A sweet fragrance becomes part of a person's mouth...We become what we love, either a good or foul odor of Christ. The person who loves beauty will become beautiful once he has been transformed by the good he received. (**Ecclesiastes**, J.422-23) Under the sway of God's power we experience a victory of that which is positive over the negative (evil), of interior passivity over the exterior activity of the downward-tending passions mentioned above. It should be stressed that taken in themselves, neither desire nor pleasure are condemnable. But when spirit is opposed to the body, Gregory gives to the reality of pleasure a passionate sense (cf. J.319, "delighting the senses," te aisthesei ten hedonen pherein). He employs the world hedone as corporeal pleasure or more properly, love of one's body which subjects both soul and spirit to itself. A passage from Gregory's treatise **On the Inscriptions of the Psalms** clearly brings out this point: Human nature has difficulty in accepting any aversion to pleasure (I call pleasure love of one's body. The soul's happiness does not partake of anything unreasonable and is not slavishly devoted to pleasure)...Evil

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seduces our sense perceptions while virtue gladdens our souls by directing them aright. (J.28) Our human spirits are now trapped in the tragedy of deception, apate, a term frequently used throughout the **Ecclesiastes** treatise. This word signifies the seducing appearances of the world and our intellect's attempt to justify itself in its abnormal position. Gregory uses the expression proairesis pneumatos, "waywardness of spirit," for the soul's predicament. Refer to two passages from the **Commentary on Ecclesiastes**: So I hated life because the work that was wrought under the sun was evil before me, for all is vanity and waywardness of spirit. (J.362) "Anything I have accomplished does not endure except my opinion and free choice [proairesis] with regard to my pursuits." He [Ecclesiastes] says that all things are vain and waywardness [proairesis] of spirit. (J.367) As we have briefly seen above, proairesis means choice, but it can also assume the connotation of a course of action which has deviated from the intended goal or end one originally had in mind. Hence, the ability to interchange the two meanings in the passage above (J.367). Since the soul has freely chosen this path of apate, it is now blind to God's light and true liberty; it prefers the prison of unrestrained activity such as engaging in all kinds of projects, a fact well documented throughout **Ecclesiastes**. Dominated as we are by a compulsive bond to things of this earth and the desire to propagate or extend ourselves through such projects as the construction of buildings and monuments, hope of redemption from this compulsion still exists which stems from a realization of our present aischune (disgrace, shame). This is a profound awareness of sin and its results which in turn begets a desire to escape our predicament. From God's point of view aischune is both a warning and powerful ally against any further tendency to sin. And from our human point of view, aischune is united to the capacity for self-expression. A passage from **Ecclesiastes** reveals how Gregory perceives the positive side of aischune as related to memory which forms the first step of our ascension to God: Because nature tends towards evil, we are forgetful of the good; but when enjoyment of the good returns, oblivion envelopes evil. We have no remembrance of the first and last things...No such memory will exist in the future, that is, the last state [he eschate katastasis] will utterly destroy the memory of evil deeds. (J.297-98) This "last state" for Gregory corresponds to the "original blessed state" (cf. J.297) which we had before our fall into sin. We therefore have a beginning and end rooted in God, yet our awareness of this linear dimension stretching from a past into a future is often shadowed over by existential knowledge of our fallen condition. Nevertheless, hope is given to us by Christ's resurrection from the dead. This event stands midway between our original blessed state⁽²⁵⁾ and our final existence. Gregory claims that a third element is integrally united to the other two conditions, "the resurrection which is nothing other than the restoration (apokatastasis) of all things to their original state" (J.296). The commentary which the bishop of Nyssa elaborates upon the book of Ecclesiastes essentially revolves around the vanity or

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transitory nature of this world and man's involvement in it. In sharp contrast to such vanity, Gregory juxtaposes for our contemplation the positive means to transcend such futility or our efforts unaided by grace. Note how in another passage from **Ecclesiastes** that Gregory posits wholeness or apokatastasis in contrast to vanity's insubstantiality: When one sheep strayed from the heavenly way of life, evil drew our nature to an arid, uncultivated place; no longer does this number [one] pertain to the sheep which have not strayed, but refers to the ninety-nine sheep. Vanity does not belong to the flock which is why "deficiency cannot be numbered." Therefore Christ comes to seek and save the lost sheep. He places it upon his shoulders, thereby restoring [apokatastasis] the sheep lost in the vanity of insubstantial things in order to make whole the number of God's creation by saving the lost along with those who have not been destroyed. (J.305) This example of the Good Shepherd (Christ) who places the lost sheep on his shoulders plays an important role in Gregory's thought. As Hubner points out, it appears in connection with his struggle against the Apollinarian heresy.⁽²⁶⁾ Gregory loves to see in this lost sheep concrete individuals whose unity, according to von Balthasar, is similarly concrete⁽²⁷⁾, that is, it has real existence now as the visible Church. Time and sexuality are destined to pass away; rather, they will be fulfilled in the pleroma, a term which implies the fullness of reality or integration of every created being once they have attained the re-constituted state of apokatastasis as found on J.299 of the **Ecclesiastes** commentary ("the assemble, pleroma, of the Church"). We find two important reference pertaining to the redemption of the lost sheep in Gregory's **Commentary on the Song of Songs**: Where do you feed, good Shepherd, you who take the entire flock upon your shoulders? For there is one sheep which you have taken upon your shoulders, our human nature. Show me the verdant place. (J.61) With his [Christ's] body, that is, the ass, he hastened to the place where evil had befallen man, healed his wounds, put him upon his own beast, and made for his loving providence a resting place in which all those who labor and are burdened can rest. (J.428)⁽²⁸⁾ Here we see a refinement upon the passage quoted above, **Ecclesiastes** J.305 where the flock is identified with human nature in its entirety which Christ had assumed. Now the character of Ecclesiastes can assume something of a "man of sorrows" after Isaiah's suffering servant (Is. 52.13-15). Ecclesiastes himself did not suffer after the fashion of Isaiah's servant, but he certainly depicted the human suffering and vanity around him. With a play on the Greek word ekklesia and its derivative ekklesiastes, Gregory sees Christ as leader of the Church. When reading this passage, we may keep in mind the apokatastasis or restoration of scattered members into his one body: Perhaps this inscription refers to the leader of the Church [ekklesia]. The true Ecclesiastes [ekklesiastes, that is, Christ] gathers into one assembly [eis hen pleroma] those persons who have been scattered often and frequently deceived. Who is he except the true king of Israel to whom Nathaniel said, "You are the son of God and the king of Israel?" (**Ecclesiastes**, J.280) The

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divinization of humanity by reason of Christ's role as our true ekklesiastes is already accomplished in time through his resurrection. The apokatastasis of fallen humanity, an alternate term Gregory employs for the resurrection, extends to its original state of equality with the angels (isaggelos).⁽²⁹⁾ Although this mention of angels is not explicit in **Ecclesiastes**, it nevertheless is implied with Christ's role as "leader of the Church:" "He who summons every creature, seeks the lost, and gathers the scattered into one, ponders this earthly existence which lies under heaven" (J.314). Unlike his famous predecessor Origen, Gregory denies the pre-existence of souls; rather, the basis for unity between humankind and the angels lies in their spiritual nature. A passage from the **Song Commentary** bears this out: They [souls or disciples of Christ] are not to swear by the passing world, but by the angelic nature [eis phuseos ton aggelon] which always exists. They are exhorted to be attentive to the angels who ratify the stable, constant life of virtue. After the resurrection we have been promised a life similar to the angels, and he who promised it does not lie. It follows, therefore, that life in this world should be a preparation for the one we hope for later. (J.134) Here we have a mature realization in Gregory's **Song Commentary** of what he had examined so thoroughly in his **Ecclesiastes Commentary**, the transitory nature of this present existence. Note, though, how the theme of virtue (arete) resounds throughout Gregory's works as in **Ecclesiastes**: "The teaching of Ecclesiastes pertains only to suitable behavior in the Church, that is, how to direct a person in virtue" (J.279-80). And from the **Song Commentary**: "We are not to regard just one of the virtues while neglecting other right actions" (J.82). Thus virtuous action is enjoined upon us regardless of the stage of our spiritual progress, whether it is symbolized by the biblical book of Proverbs, Ecclesiastes or the Song of Songs. Gregory of Nyssa's famous **Life of Moses** stands midway, so to speak, between his first two ascents on high to God symbolized by Proverbs and Ecclesiastes on one hand, and the Song of Songs on the other.⁽³⁰⁾ **Moses** is a more sophisticated treatise on the spiritual life coming after **Ecclesiastes** which also has a lot to say about the instability of this world and our pursuits. A comparison of two passages from these works shows a development in the thought of Gregory: What is this influx of water which never fills the ever-constant sea? Ecclesiastes speaks like this in order to explain the insubstantiality of our frenzied pursuits by these elements which constitute man's existence. (**Ecclesiastes**, J.286) For he who ascends certainly does not stand still, and he who stands still does not move upwards. But here the ascent takes place by means of the standing. I mean by this that the firmer and more immovable one remains in the Good, the more he progresses in the course of virtue. The man who in his reasoning is uncertain and liable to slip, since he has no firm grounding in the Good. (**Moses**, J.243) One can see in these passages that the created spirit moves with respect to two orientations, towards the good and towards that which is contrary to it. The character of a created spirit endowed with intelligence such as human beings is that

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they have the capacity for a perpetual increase in being. As the first passage above shows, transitory material elements comprise our mortal frame. Hence, a human being cannot but help act in the same way, only in this case the moral dimension to reality is introduced which involves the conflict between good and evil. The passage from **Moses** better articulates that movement which is channeled upwards towards God. Such upward direction tends towards our true homeland or politeia in fellowship with the angels. Faced with such an ontological gap between Creator and creation, we resemble persons at the edge of a promontory over an abyss who is subject to vertigo or hiliggia: A person's foot can therefore touch that ridge falling off to the depths below and find neither step nor support for his hand. To me, this example pertains to the soul's passage through intervals of time in its search for [God's] nature which exists before eternity and is not subject to time. His nature cannot be grasped, for it lacks space, time, measure and anything else we can apprehend; instead, our mind is overcome with dizziness and stumbles all over the place because it cannot lay hold of transcendent reality. Being powerless, it returns to its connatural state. (**Ecclesiastes**, J.413-14) This passage occurs towards the end of the Seventh Homily. By the precision of his analysis, the vigor of dialectic and the elevation of thought and emphasis, these pages are perhaps the most beautiful which Gregory of Nyssa has written where he reveals himself both as a poet and a Christian leader steeped in the best metaphysical traditions of the ancient world. Shortly after this passage, the bishop of Nyssa brings his commentary upon **Ecclesiastes'** words, "A time to keep silence," to a close by saying that our human intelligence must remain in silent awe and adoration at the mystery of God's transcendence. It is on these last several pages of the Seventh Homily that Gregory sets forth his insights regarding the utter transcendence of God: Thus when reason confronts that which transcends reason it is time to be silent and marvel at his unutterable power which cannot be explained since it is hidden in one's consciousness. It knows that the great prophets speak of God's works, not of God himself. "Who can tell of the Lord's power" [Ps 105.2]?; "I will tell of all your works" [Ps 9.2] and "Generation after generation will praise your deeds" [Ps 144.4]. Roger Leys has remarked with regard to this section of **Ecclesiastes** that Gregory of Nyssa proceeds in a dialectic fashion, that is, he philosophically analyzes the conditions which logically lead to our awareness of God's transcendence.⁽³¹⁾ Leys continues to say that the two dialectical elements of both our possession of the Good (God) and our hiliggia⁽³²⁾ or vertigo before his infinite beauty are united in the **Life of Moses** where both themes are synthesized as a mystical presentation of the spiritual life. The access to Mt. Sinai symbolizes an intense preparation which is simultaneously moral and spiritual: The contemplation of God is not effected by sight and hearing, nor is it comprehended by any of the customary perceptions of the mind...He who would approach the knowledge of things sublime must first purify his manner of life from all sensual and irrational emotion...When he is so purified, then he assaults

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the mountain. (**Life of Moses**, J.157)⁽³³⁾

A very important aspect of Gregory's thought which we find in his **Commentary on Ecclesiastes** is that of diastema which has the connotation of a standing apart, extended existence or an interval. When applied to theology, diastema cannot be understood as a spatial gap between Creator and his creation; more properly speaking, it is a gap existing on the side of creation which has a beginning (arche) and end (telos).⁽³⁴⁾ Gregory expresses the temporal limitations of our present existence as follows: All our notions are bound by time [te diastematike paratasei]; they attempt to transcend their proper limits but cannot. Intervals of time constitute all our thoughts as well as the thought content. Yet we have learned to seek and to cherish that which transcends all creation. (**Ecclesiastes**, J.412) Here human thought must finally acknowledge its defeat and realize that it is bounded. Since our language functions in a diastematical world where it is suitable only for describing events within space and time, how, then, can it be employed to speak of something which is adiastaton ('God's nature which is not subject to temporal extension [adiastaton],' J.412) or that which pertains to God? Theological language⁽³⁵⁾ is a necessary means to draw us beyond our diastematical world but it cannot communicate the Divinity to us. We need to experience this realm trans-conceptually, non-dogmatically, and therefore through symbolic means. Hence, the need for sacraments which play an important role throughout all of Gregory's writings. Instead of explaining the mystery of God, sacraments make present his saving grace.

One of Gregory's most original insights for which he is justly renowned is his teaching on our perpetual growth in the knowledge of God. The term he employs for this is epektasis, tension or expansion. Once we have realized the transcendence of God with respect to creation as contained in the term diastema and described so well in **Ecclesiastes**, another sort of change becomes possible, the movement of perpetual ascent. This movement reaches for the Immovable, the opposite pole of meaningless motion of the material world. Through epektasis⁽³⁶⁾ unity with God is never achieved; instead, the soul undergoes eternal expansion towards God. Let us contrast two passages from Gregory's writings which depict both opposing motions: The wonders you consider in heaven or on earth, the sun or sea, should help explain your human nature. Sunrise and sunset resemble our human nature, for they both have in common the one course [circle] of life. When we come into existence, we later return to our natural place. (**Ecclesiastes**, J.287) The Apostle's words are thus verified: the stretching out [epektasis] to what lies before is related to forgetfulness of earlier accomplishments. The good which is superior to the one already attained holds the attention of those participating in it while not allowing them to look at the past. (**Song of Songs**, J.128) The **Ecclesiastes** passage reveals the blind, cyclic nature of existence when the guiding principle, hegemon, is

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lacking. If we follow our natural impulses, we too assume the nature of such non-directional movement. On the other hand, the **Song** passage takes up movement, gives it direction and posits a goal. Note how such movement lacks remembrance of the past, something which **Ecclesiastes** cannot escape. You might say that the former work depicts destiny, our slavish attachment to a goal which is unaware of a guiding principle. The latter treatise, however, implies the sense of mission, awareness of being sent from Someone towards a predetermined end. The presence of this awareness makes it only natural for the Song of Songs to be a dialogue between two persons in the same way a person is in communication with the person (God) who originated the mission.

Although Gregory does not develop his well-known doctrine of "from glory to glory" in **Ecclesiastes**, he does a superb job at detailing the negative side of this reality, "vanity of vanities." The latter is a movement downward or towards materiality, a descent into non-being dependent upon our free choice. Our spirits are therefore trapped in temporal illusions which have seduced us, and we attempt to justify our debased condition. Our freedom of choice (*proairesis*) assumes a kind of subjective estimation: "Ecclesiastes considers any worthwhile pursuit as despicable when he first passionately welcomed vanity as beneficial," J.361-62. The bishop of Nyssa draws a parallel between the expression "vanity of vanities" and the Holy of Holies: That which is holy surpasses anything profane, while the holy of holies⁽³⁷⁾ is considered most excellent by reason of its sanctity. Thus our comprehension of the good corresponds to the intensity of expression used in scripture which we correctly assume as meaning "vanity of vanities..." Just as we employ the phrases "service of works" and "holy of holies" to represent something outstanding, so does "vanity of vanities" demonstrate the incomparable excess of vanity. (J.283) The opposite direction or movement upwards towards God consists in our transition from "glory to glory." It is also a process of liberation not only from the prison of cyclic movement graphically depicted in **Ecclesiastes** but towards a deeper love of God. The divisions of time in this commentary ("a time to keep quiet," etc) are stages of growth in our awareness of vanity. At each stage Gregory adds an antidote, so to speak, to the fleeting nature of these periods of time.⁽³⁸⁾ Here we have a foreshadowing of his later development of movement, "from glory to glory," which will appear in such works as the **Life of Moses**. However, the **Song Commentary** shows the flowering of this expression borrowed from Second Corinthians 3.18: While the bridegroom exhorts the bride who is already beautiful to become beautiful, he clearly recalls the Apostle's words who bids the same image to be transformed "from glory to glory." By glory he means what we have grasped and found at any given moment. No matter how great and exalted that glory may be, we believe that it is less than that for which we still hope. (J.160) Gregory's concept of perpetual growth resolves two difficulties Greek philosophy had with movement: it

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was perceived as the expression of a lack of tending to rest in the possession of the Good which the soul lacks. Also, desire is fulfilled at each instant but the Good communicated dilates the capacity of our spirit. This problem is why for the bishop of Nyssa growth is a synthesis of kinesis and stasis: movement is never compromised but stabilized in what we already have acquired. Compare two texts as follows: But inasmuch as we perceive the good in pleasure, any delight sets desire aflame, for pleasure is united to desire and is always attractive to each stage of our growth. (**Ecclesiastes**, J.313) All wells contain still water; only the bride has running water with both a well's depth and a continuous flow of water...It seems that she has no further to reach once she has been compared to beauty's archetype. She closely imitates her bridegroom's fountain by one of her own; his life by hers and his water by her water. (**Song of Songs**, J.293) Here are two radically opposed passages. The first one may be characterized by a sense of destiny as mentioned just above; the desire a person experiences in this condition is compulsive, leading as it does to a further intensification of desire. In other words, no sense of communion with another person is present, only a fusion between passionate desire and the object of its intent. The second passage presents a clear sense of mission, of being sent, which implies dialogue with the source of the sending (bridegroom). Note that imitation plays a large role here; a certain "space" exists between sender and sent in mission which allows each party to contemplate the other and thereby imitate each other. Hence union is characteristic of the **Song Commentary** as opposed to the compulsive behavior depicted in **Ecclesiastes**. We are invited to detach ourselves from this world's mobility and imitate the stability which stands guard over the earth at the heart of the universe. Refer to a passage from **Ecclesiastes** which parallels the stability of our hearts⁽³⁹⁾ in the good with that of the world: Do not be more inanimate than the earth nor more foolish than beasts which lack feeling, for you are endowed with reason and the capacity to administer...allow temperance to abide in your life along with firm faith, constant love, stability in every kind of beauty, that you may resemble the earth's eternal stability. (J.288-89) Failure to abide by the promptings emanating from this heart, seat of the hegmonikon or guiding principle mentioned earlier, results in our becoming slaves not only to passions but to the world about us with its transitory pleasures. Recognition of our debased condition then gives rise to a nostalgia for our kinship with the angels that we may have total participation with God: "Now is the time to weep while the time to laugh consists in hope, for our present sadness, like a mother, begets joy which is stored up for the future" (J.386).

Gregory takes up Ecclesiastes' words and applies them to the Church's struggles with the transitory environment in which she finds herself. Only this Church can be a receptacle for a true teaching on virtue and appreciation of invisible beauty as stated at the beginning of **Ecclesiastes**: The teaching of Ecclesiastes pertains only to suitable

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behavior in the Church, that is, how to direct a person in virtue. This book aims to elevate our minds above the senses and to attain what lies beyond them. (J.279-80) In Gregory's eyes, only the Church can be a receptacle for a true teaching on virtue and source for appreciation of invisible beauty because it alone is endowed with the capacity to imitate God's stability. Only by situating ourselves within her through the sacrament of baptism can we move on to the final stage of spiritual development which Gregory perceives as the Song of Songs. In other words, Gregory desires to transform the natural restlessness caused by our involvement with material concerns as depicted in the Third Homily of **Ecclesiastes** into the bride's search for her beloved spouse as we find in his **Song Commentary**. Refreshment and joy lie in store for the person who has made the transition from Proverbs to Ecclesiastes and then at last to the Song of Songs: The passions now disturbing us because of the flesh will not be restored with those bodies; rather, we shall become tranquil. No longer will the flesh's prudence dispute with the soul...Nature will then be cleansed from all such things, and one spirit will be in both. (**Song of Songs**, J.30) But before a person attains such a blessed state, he or she must pass through a period of purification. There is always the temptation to leap forward immediately to later stages of spiritual development by imitating the external characteristics of this stage. Perhaps it is for this reason that Gregory went into such great details when he describes vanity's attendant evils. We have no mention of a mirror as image or eikon of the soul in **Ecclesiastes** where God reflects his goodness (and therefore virtues). Nevertheless, the relationship between the human heart as seat of God's presence does assume the reflective nature of a mirror which Gregory develops in later works. This mirror is not passive but active, for it absorbs the rays emanating from God.⁽⁴⁰⁾ Note the alignment between God, virtue, mirror and detachment in the following passage from the **Song Commentary**: Such a person would not have it in his nature to look steadily upon the Word of God as upon the sun; rather he sees it within himself as in a mirror. For the rays of that true, divine virtue shine forth in a pure life by the out-flow of detachment [apatheia] and make the invisible visible to us. (J.90)

Despite the initially negative tone of the book of Ecclesiastes and Gregory's development of its themes pertaining to human and created vanity, he brings his commentary to a close on a positive note. He quotes the book's author, "I know that there is nothing better for men than to be happy and enjoy themselves as long as they live" (Eccl. 3.12, J.441). A few pages earlier the bishop of Nyssa says in the same context that "God has made all things for man's good" (J.438). We see here the happiness willed by God for man even in this present existence, for "the enjoyment of good things enlivens those persons worthy to receive their eternal hope" (J.441). And **Ecclesiastes** concludes that "our eyes should be fixed on the good which is in Christ

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Jesus," that is, our "Ecclesiastes" or leader of the Church with which Gregory introduces his commentary.

A note regarding the text, Commentary on Ecclesiastes: The critical edition by Paul Alexander may be found in Gregorii Nysseni: In Inscriptiones Psalmorum, In Sextum Psalmum, In Ecclesiasten Homiliae, vol. 5, published by E.J. Brill (Leiden, 1962), pp.277-442(41).

Within the translation are the letters "J" and "M" followed by numbers. "J" refers to Alexander's critical edition of the text. The task of producing a critical edition of Gregory of Nyssa's works was begun under the direction of Werner Jaeger and has continued after his death. The letter "M" which is followed by a column number refers to the edition edited under the direction of J.P. Migne in Patrologia Graecae, volumen 44, columns 616-753 (Paris, 1958)

The First Homily

[J.277 & M.617] [The book of] Ecclesiastes is offered for our examination because it is especially useful and valuable for contemplation. When [the book of] Proverbs has exercised our minds by its obscure words, wise sayings, riddles and various twists of words as contained in the Introduction [1.6], we find an ascent for those persons who have advanced [J.278] to more perfect lessons with regard to this lofty, divinely inspired book. If a toilsome, arduous meditation on Proverbs prepares us for these lessons, how much more laborious and difficult must it be to now examine such sublime matters proposed for our contemplation! Just as wrestlers in a gymnasium who exert themselves for greater contests strip down in order to exercise, so it seems to me that a meditation on Proverbs' teachings trains our souls and makes them supple for struggles on the Church's behalf. If we diligently carry out this meditation, what need is there to consider these struggles? Since no one can make a worthy presentation of this text's surpassing greatness, scripture employs [the example of] a stadium with regards to the greatness of these struggles for persons aspiring to strengthen their thoughts by athletic training. In this way they do not fall, but in every struggle with their thoughts they keep their minds upright through the truth. Since one of the divine precepts bids us to search the scriptures [Jn 5.39], it is indeed necessary that once our minds have pursued the truth even though we failed to attain the nobility of its thoughts, we are not perceived as despising the Lord's command in our effort to discharge our duty worthily. Therefore let us examine the scripture [J.279] before us as best we can for he [God] who has bidden us to search will bestow the power [to preach]. As it is written, "The Lord will give a word to those who preach it with much power" [Ps 67.12].

- (1:1)** We must first consider the inscription of this book: "The words of Ecclesiastes, son of David king of Israel in Jerusalem." The law of Moses is read in every church along with the prophets, psalms, historical books and other Old and New Testament readings. How, then, does this special inscription enhance Ecclesiastes, and what are we [M.620] to make of it? Among all the other writings, histories and prophecies, the purpose of [this inscription] pertains only to what is not beneficial for the Church. What value does the Church see in reflecting upon wars, rulers of peoples, founders of cities, settlers, vanished kingdoms, weddings, births which have been diligently recorded and other things taught by scripture? Do they have the aim of piety on behalf of the Church's behalf? The teaching of Ecclesiastes pertains only to suitable behavior in the Church [J.280], that is, how to direct a person in virtue. This book aims to elevate our minds above the senses, to abandon great, brilliant, and noble appearances, to transcend the senses and to attain what transcends them.

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Perhaps this inscription refers to the leader of the Church [ekklesia]. The true Ecclesiastes [ekklesiastes, Christ] gathers into one assembly those persons who often have been scattered and frequently deceived. Who could he be except the true king of Israel to whom Nathaniel said, "You are the son of God and the king of Israel" [Jn 1.49]? If these words pertain to the king of Israel, the Son of God, as the Gospel says, then he is called Ecclesiastes. We will not deviate from the inscription's meaning provided that we learn about him who firmly establishes the Church through the Gospel and to whom these words apply. "The words of Ecclesiastes, son of David" [1.1]: thus Matthew [J.281] begins his gospel with the name David and calls him Lord.

(1:2)

"Vanity of vanities," says Ecclesiastes, "all is vanity" [1.2]. Vanity may be described as something which lacks existence but exists only in the utterance of this word. The reality behind the word is non-existent; only the letters transmit a useless, empty sound. These meaningless sounds randomly strike the ear as in a game when we create names which lack meaning. This is one form of vanity. Another refers to persons who zealously accumulate objects with no goal in mind. For example, childrens' sand buildings, the shooting at stars with arrows, trapping the wind and racing with one's shadow while trying to reach its head. If we take another example, we see that they all fall under the term "vanity." Often human custom calls vanity the looking towards a goal and the pursuit [M.621] of something profitable; should a person do something contrary or foolish, he invests his energy to no avail [J.282]. This is too is called vanity. We usually say in such circumstances, "I have labored, hoped, and worked in vain." Instead of examining each correct use of vanity, we will briefly deal with the significance of this term. Vanity is either a senseless word, thoughtless action, unwise counsel, zeal without a goal or something completely worthless.

If we have already obtained an understanding of vanity, we must now examine the meaning of the phrase, "vanity of vanities." Perhaps the intent we are seeking would be clearer if we turn our attention to this phrase's scriptural usage. Scripture does mention useful, necessary actions, but the outstanding deeds which men eagerly pursue and which one sees with regard to worship of God are called "service of works" Num [4.47]. I think that history shows by analogy those things which are more advantageous for our pursuit.

Eagerness to perform deeds gives reason for a leisure enthusiastic for performing other deeds which are more lofty and honorable. Therefore scripture mentions a holy place [Ex 26.33]; again, [J.283] that which is holy surpasses anything profane while the holy of holies is considered most excellent by reason of its sanctity. We have learned from a better usage of scripture that the intensity of what is proposed is signified, for example, by a correct understanding of "vanity of vanities." The text

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says that appearances are not simply vain; rather, they are characterized by a special kind of vanity as if someone were claimed to be more dead than the dead and more lifeless than the lifeless. Any exaggeration is out of place here, yet it serves to clarify a point. Just as we employ the phrases "service of works" and "holy of holies" to represent something outstanding, so "vanity of vanities" demonstrates the incomparable excess of vanity.

Such words as these should not condemn creation in its entirety. This charge would apply to God, the creator of the universe, if we knew that the creator who fashioned all things from nothing had made them in vain [J.284]. Since man's constitution is two-fold, the soul together with the body, the manner our [M.624] life is divided into these two categories respectively. One is subject to death while the other is free from passion and corruptibility; only one is concerned with the present while the other concerns itself with that which abides forever. Since a great difference exists between what is mortal and immortal, temporal and eternal, Ecclesiastes urges us not to dwell upon this sensible life which when compared with true life is non-existent and insubstantial life.

No one should blame the Creator because he made both soul and body; if the life of the flesh is condemned, God its maker must bear this censure. But he [Ecclesiastes] who says these things is not yet outside the flesh, nor has he adequately grasped a higher form of life. Having been trained in the divine mysteries, he certainly knows that human life resembles the divine nature. However, sensible life is given to this [human] nature so that [J.285] knowledge of appearances may lead the soul to recognize invisible reality. As Wisdom says, "By the greatness and beauty of the creatures the Maker of all is proportionately seen" [13.5]. Human folly does not see the wonder lying behind appearances but admires what it beholds. Since our senses operate in a temporal and transitory medium, we learn through [Wisdom's] noble voice that the person who sees these things sees nothing. But the person guided through such temporalities to an understanding of him who exists, grasps the constancy of [God's] nature through transitory reality, sees with his mind him who is always the same, beholds the true good and possesses what he sees, for knowledge is the possession of this good.

- (1:3)** "What profit is there for a man in all his labor under the sun" [Eccl 1.3]? Ecclesiastes calls this bodily existence "labor" which we pursue to no gain. What profit is it for man? That is, what becomes of the soul which exerts itself for superficial things? What is the purpose of life, or how permanent is transitory beauty [J.286]? The sun which has enlightened heaven above runs its own course and is subject to darkness at sunset whereas the earth is stationary and unmovable; anything subject to movement does not stand still. This demonstrates that everything is subject to interval of a temporal nature, for nothing changes to a newer

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condition. The sea is a receptacle for water which tends to flow everywhere [M.625]; water never ceases to flow while the sea never grows larger. What is the goal of the water's course which always fills the unquenchable sea? What is this influx of water which never fills the ever-constant sea? Ecclesiastes speaks like this that he may explain the insubstantiality of our frenzied pursuits which result from elements constituting man's existence. If the sun's course consists in this, it too has no limit; neither is there any succession between day and night, and the earth is condemned to remain ever unmoved. The rivers also labor in vain, for they are consumed by the insatiable sea which receives this constant inflow to no avail. If this is true, what about man who is subject to such elements? Why are we astonished at the rise and fall of a generation which follows a natural course [J.287] because a generation of men always succeeds the one before it and so forth?

(1:6) What does Ecclesiastes cry out to the Church? That you, oh man, who contemplate the universe, should understand your own nature. The wonders you behold in heaven or on earth, the sun or sea, should help explain your human nature. Sunrise and sunset resemble our human nature because they both have in common the one course [circle] of life. When we come into existence, we later return to our natural place. Once our life sets, our light passes under the earth which then lays hold of it. The earth is a cycle in constant motion which indeed returns to its natural place. Ecclesiastes speaks of the sun which rises and inclines towards the south; when the sun passes under the earth, the opposite or the north, receives it, thereby forming a perpetual cycle. "Round and round," he says [1.6]. Man's spirit (it takes its name from this aspect of his nature) [J.288] resembles this circular motion. "The wind goes and returns to its circuit" [1.6]. These words are of no small value for your life. What is more splendid than light and more radiant than its rays? But if the sun goes under the earth, its beams and rays disappear.

(1:4) Let a person taking these matters into consideration conduct himself with greater discretion and despise notoriety, learning from our observations that fame is transitory and can quickly change to its opposite. Nothing remains forever in its present state; neither youth, beauty [M.628] nor fame arising from power, all of which result from good fortune. A virtuous life seems laborious in comparison, and examples taken from this earthly existence educate the soul with regard to more steadfast realities. "The earth stands forever" [1.4]. What can be more laborious than this firmness and stability which lasts forever whose existence extends throughout all eternity? The time of your struggle is short. Do not be more inanimate than the earth nor more foolish than [beasts] which lack feeling, for you are endowed with reason and the capacity to administer. Rather, as the Apostle says, "Continue in the things you have learned and have been assured of" [2Tim 3.14] in steadfastness and constant stability.

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Since these words refer to the divine commands, "be steadfast and unmovable [1Cor 15.58]" [J.289], allow temperance to abide in your life along with firm faith, constant love and stability in every kind of beauty, that you may resemble the earth's eternal stability. If anyone is greedy like the ocean with its expansive, boundedness desire which the inflow of waters cannot satisfy, let one be cured of his illness by looking upon the ocean. In this way he will not transgress his own bounds in the multitude of waters but will retain the same fullness without the addition of more water. In similar fashion pleasures arising from human nature with its present limit cannot expand its gluttonous appetite to keep pace with their great number; rather, the influx [of pleasures] does not cease even though our capacity for enjoyment is limited. If enjoyment cannot exceed the limit of nature, why are we pressed by an onrush of harmful forces which are never beneficial since they have surpassed what had been added earlier? Since Ecclesiastes begins by defining vanity for us as a foolish word or action, we do not consider as deficient anything which has a goal, whether of deed or speech [J.290]. Every human endeavor closely resembles children preoccupied with making toys out of sand; when they cease from work, the sand melts away and leaves no trace of their efforts.

Such is man's life. Sand represents ambition, power, wealth and every pleasure of the flesh. Immature souls spend themselves in the vain pursuit of insubstantial possessions. If they only leave the sand, I mean the flesh, they will recognize the vanity of their efforts. While enjoyment is inevitably bound up [M.629] with this material existence, persons take nothing with themselves except their own consciences. It seems to me that the great Ecclesiastes transcends such things. With his naked, immaterial soul, he utters words which may pertain to us when, so to speak, we are far removed from this coastal area. It is from here that we have ejected the sea's sand and have separated ourselves from all the noise around us together with the sea's roaring waves [J.291].

- (1:1,2)** Let us now attend to the words, "Vanity of vanities, all is vanity," and "What advantage is to man in his labor under the sun?" In my opinion these words represent a soul stripped of its present condition here below when it migrates to the life for which it yearns. If a person pursues life's nobler aspects, he views [his earlier condition] in a harsh light and loathes his present experience in comparison to what he has discovered. If he who had been passionately concerned with material [possessions] became disposed towards those which come unexpectedly and learned through experience about life's ridiculous pursuits, he can rightly lift up his voice in lament over them. He speaks sorrowfully and with repentance over our foolish actions saying "Vanity of vanities" and other similar words.

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(1:8) "All things are full of labor, and a man will not be able to speak of them" [1.8]. Nothing is considered easier than being quick to speak. What labor, then, pertains to the person who so wishes to express himself? The tongue is moist, easily moved and effortlessly conforms itself to any word it wishes to utter. We inhale air without difficulty, an activity which produces sound; both lips and cheeks harmoniously contribute to speech [J.292]. Therefore, what labor can we observe in the effortless creation of a word? We do not create speech by digging up stones, bearing burdens or by any other labor; rather, we reveal our thoughts through speech. But since speech is effortless, some labor is involved in words which a person cannot express. "Let the elders be worthy of a double honor, especially those who labor in the word" [1Tim 5.17]. According to custom, an elder is a person who has outgrown the unruly period of youth and has attained old age; if a person of unstable mind and undisciplined life is not yet an elder, even though he may have grey hair, he is still a youth. Therefore his words which are truly words ought to be useful and beneficial for the soul by containing sweat and much exertion. "The husbandman who labors must first partake of the fruits" [2Tim 2.6]. The person who uttered these words said they were not simply as useful but that our lives may manifest virtue in deeds [M.632] instead of mere words. Therefore all words are laborious by those who lead the way to virtue; having first realized them in themselves, they can teach them. It is first necessary to partake of [virtue's] fruits [J.293] that we might cultivate them in ourselves through virtue for other persons.

A feeble mind may interpret in its own way what we have just said. Since vanity exists apart from the senses and the mind contemplating unseen realities attempts to explain what it comprehends, we need to strenuously exert ourselves in the task of interpretation even though we cannot clearly express that which is inexpressible. We see the heavens, perceive their light, transverse the earth, inhale air, drink water and use fire in common. If we wish to understand each of these manifestations which are seen by reason of their essence or the means by which they subsist, a man cannot speak of other matters which are beyond him because his ability to comprehend unutterable reality is inadequate. If a word is labor with respect to those things transcending human ability and nature, then what can we say about the Word or the Father of the Word? Any lofty, eloquent words fall speechless if the true significance of what we seek is taken into consideration. This [silence] alone is [J.294] true speech about God because if a person capable of generating all kinds of thoughts fails to include thoughts proper to God--even though his voice is deemed worthy--still his speech is not a word. Man cannot speak. The sight of visible reality cannot behold what pertains to the soul; rather, we who are always looking see nothing while we ignorantly receive sense perceptions. Vision cannot pass through color, yet it is the measure of one's efforts with regard to appearances. Ecclesiastes therefore says, "The eye will not be satisfied with seeing, neither shall the ear be satisfied with hearing" [1.8]. Our

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capacity for hearing cannot be satisfied with every word, for no word can fully express what we comprehend. How, then, can our hearing be satisfied with the object it seeks when this object cannot produce satisfaction?

(1:9) Ecclesiastes now responds to his own words by asking, "What is that which has been? The very thing which shall be. What is that which has been done [M.633]? The very thing which shall be done" [1:9]. What does he wish to express by these questions? We naturally state questions or objections from [J.295] what we have learned because if all is vanity, it is clear that not a single thing has existence. Vanity is indeed insubstantial, and this in-substantiality is not present in anything which exists. If such things lack existence, then tell me, what has permanence in being? Here is a brief answer to your desire to know what exists. Do you wish to know what has been? Realize what is to come and you will know that had been. Oh man, you who have exalted yourself through virtue, understand what you will become. If you have formed your soul in every good and have washed away all filth coming from material things, what will be happen when you have so adorned yourself? What form will you assume? If you fully understand this, you have learned what had existed from the very beginning, namely, that which is according to God's image and likeness [Gen 1.26]. Where now is that doctrine which once existed and in which men had put their hope yet no longer exists? But he who instructs us [J.296] in lofty matters responds by calling present events "vanity" since anything existing in the present lacks existence. And what, Ecclesiastes says, is that which had been done? The very thing which shall be done. Let no one listening to these words think that much talk and the repetition of words is vanity by the distinction between what is and what had been, for they demonstrate the difference between body and soul. Although the meaning of terms does not differ that much, the text does make a distinction to clearly manifest the difference for you. The soul existed right from the beginning; it had been purified in the past and will appear in the future. God fashioned the human body and will show the resurrection at the proper time, for that which comes after the resurrection was indeed fashioned first. The resurrection is nothing other than the restoration [apokatastasis] of all things to their original state.

Ecclesiastes then adds that nothing is excluded from that which had existed at the beginning: "There is nothing new under the sun" [1:9]. He utters these words as if to say that if something did not exist at the beginning, it did not exist at all but was thought to have existed [J.297]. Nothing under the sun is new, he says, so that anything spoken or demonstrated about the past is new and freshly come into existence. These words means that nothing new has been uttered under the sun. As for anything spoken we have the statement, "If anything indeed had

(1:10) been, it already appeared in the ages before us" [1.10]. This meaning of

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this verse [M.636] is as follows: anything new had already been made in the ages before us. If they are swallowed up in oblivion, do not wonder because the present will suffer the same fate. Because nature tends towards evil, we are forgetful of the good; but when enjoyment of the good returns, oblivion envelopes evil. We have no remembrance of the first and last things which is as though he said that the events which introduced evil after man's original blessed state will erase the memory the last things. No such memory will exist in the future; the last state [he eschate katastasis] [J.298] will utterly destroy the memory of evil deeds in Christ Jesus our Lord, to whom be glory forever and ever. Amen.

The Second Homily

(1:12) "I, Ecclesiastes," the text now says [1.12]. We now learn the identity of Ecclesiastes who gathers into one what is scattered and dispersed. He makes one flock and church in order that everyone may hear the Shepherd's lovely voice who bestows life to all. "The words that I speak are spirit and life" [Jn 6.63]. [Christ] calls himself Ecclesiastes that he might be doctor, life, resurrection, light, way, gate, truth and any other benevolent name for humankind. Just as a sick person welcomes the doctor's voice, so does the Word of life bring life to the dead when they hear the voice of the Son of Man which frees them from death's ancient dominion. Those in the grave seek [J.299] the voice of the resurrection; light is agreeable to persons in darkness, and a road is helpful for those who have strayed while a gate forms an entrance. And so Ecclesiastes speaks to those of us who belong in the Church. Let us who compose this Church now listen to his words. As a chorus looks to its leader, sailors to their pilot and soldiers to their general, so do those in the assembly of the church look to Ecclesiastes. What does he say? "I have been king over Israel in Jerusalem" [1.12]. At what time? Was it not when God set up a king in holy Mount Zion to proclaim his precepts? Of him the Lord says "You are my son; today I have begotten you" [Ps 2.6-7]. The Maker of all things, the eternal Father, said that he begot him today. Thus this temporal name does not refer to [Christ's] eternal essence but to a birth through the flesh in time for man's salvation.

(1:13) [M.637] I think that the true Ecclesiastes next teaches about the great mystery of salvation when God manifested himself in the flesh. "I applied my heart to seek out and examine by wisdom all things done under heaven" [1.13]. The reason for our Lord's [J.300] dwelling with men is to give his heart over in wisdom to consider his actions done under the sun. For man is not allowed to consider what lies above heaven just as healthy persons do not require doctors. Evil belongs to the earth. A snake is a reptile which crawls on its belly [Gen 3.14], eats earth instead of food from heaven, crawls on anything trampled down and is always on the prowl. It watches for man's heel and injects poison in those who have lost the power to tread on serpents [Lk 10.19]. For this reason Ecclesiastes gives his heart over to careful consideration of every activity done under heaven. As for what lies above the heavens, the prophet gazes at the divine magnificence and says "His magnificence is exalted above the heavens" [Ps 8.2]. Since evil oppresses the realm lying under heaven, the psalm says that sin has brought men low [Ps 106.17]. Ecclesiastes considers how things made under heaven which had no prior existence became subject to vanity and how that which lacked existence took over and became dominant. Evil cannot exist because it is non-existent, and non-existence [J.301] has no nature belonging to itself; nevertheless, vanity dominates those things which resemble it.

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Ecclesiastes has come to search through his own wisdom those actions done under the sun, their confusion, why things are subject to non-existence and how that which is insubstantial prevails against being. He knew that "God has given to the sons of men an evil trouble to be vexed with" [1.13]. This is not a pious deed we can readily understand because God has given an evil to the sons of men in order to trouble them; and so one may attribute the cause of evil to God. He who is good by nature indeed bestows goodness because every good tree bears good fruit; a grape cluster does not spring up from thorns nor do thorns come from a vine. [Mt 7.17] Therefore he who is good by nature does not offer evil from his own storehouse; a good man does not speak evil from the abundance of his heart but utters words in accord with his nature. How, then, is the fountain of grace not a source of evil? A more pious understanding suggests that God bestows upon man the gift [M.640] of free will which he abused and then became an instrument for sin. This free will is good and subject to no one, while anything subject to necessity should not [J.302] be counted as good. But any impulse coming from the mind is free; it distracts the soul to choose evil and pulls it down to passion from the lofty honors it had received. Such is the meaning of "he has given" [1.13]; not that God has given evil to men, but that men have used God's benefits to commit thoughtless evil. Holy scripture expresses this by proclaiming "God has handed them over to the disgrace of passion" [Rom 1.28], "The Lord has hardened Pharaoh's heart" [Ex 9.12], "Why, Lord, have you caused us to err from your way and have hardened our hearts not to fear you" [Is 63.17], "He caused them to wander in a desert and not in the way" [Ps 106.40], "You have deceived me, and I was deceived" [Jer 20.7] and other such remarks. An accurate understanding of these verses does not mean that human nature lacks anything unbecoming from God; rather, they censure our power of free choice which in itself is good [J.303] and a gift bestowed by God to human nature. But as a result of indiscretion, free will inclines towards the opposite way. Ecclesiastes thus sees all things done under the sun and calls them vanity. "There is not one who understands or seeks after God" [Ps 13.2] since all have turned aside and have become worthless: "Behold, all is vanity." He does not attribute this cause to God but to human free choice which he calls the wind. He condemns this wind although it was good at the beginning; there would be no need for such condemnation, but it turned aside by conforming to the world.

- (1:15)** "That which is crooked cannot be made straight" [1.15], that is, anything perverted does not befit a creature adorned by God. Similarly, the Maker who fashioned everything for himself set aright with a ruler and measuring line the parts which contribute towards the whole by having each part carefully related to the others. If any part is not set aright [J.304] by a measuring line, the harmony is certainly not distorted; rather, if each part is to be set aright, all should conform to the measuring line. And so, Ecclesiastes claims that nature perverted by

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evil cannot be disposed to right reason: "Deficiency cannot be numbered" [1.15]. A multitude [M.641] of examples used by scripture teaches that deficiency means shortage of something. One such example is the famous Paul who knows the meaning of deficiency and abundance [Phil 4.12]; he exhausted his father's substance and experienced want when famine laid hold of him [Lk 15.14]. When speaking of the saints, Paul includes along with their bodily affliction that "they were destitute and afflicted" [Heb 11.37]. Therefore, when scripture speaks of deficiency, it means want, although want is not mentioned with regard to the disciples who numbered twelve when they were one group. Once the son of perdition [Judas] died [Jn 17.12], their number was incomplete for [Judas] was not counted among the rest. A twelfth disciple was named to take Judas' place. Thus Ecclesiastes says, "deficiency cannot be numbered." What does this mean? That we were once [J.305] numbered with the full group, that is, the sacred number of one hundred rational sheep [Mt 18.12]. When one sheep strayed from the heavenly way of life, evil drew our nature to an arid, uncultivated place; no longer does this number [one] pertain to the sheep which have not strayed but to the ninety-nine sheep. Vanity does not belong to the number of those who are included which is why "deficiency cannot be numbered." Therefore Christ comes to seek and save the last sheep. He places it upon his shoulders, thereby restoring [apokatastesai] [the sheep] lost in the vanity of insubstantial things in order to make whole the number of God's creation by saving the lost along with those who have not been destroyed.

We next learn about the return of a person who has erred and the change from evil to enjoyment of the good. He [Christ] who has been tempted in all things and is without sin [Heb 4.15] holds converse with us in our human nature. He who assumed our weakness showed us a way out of evil through the infirmities of his human nature. "Instruct me in the Wisdom [Christ] according to the Solomon who was in the flesh which held converse with us." Once familiar with it, we are able to pass judgment on what men pursue. Ecclesiastes' words do not resemble those of many which cause [J.306] an abundance of grief and condemns untested persons as untrustworthy. We obtain knowledge not from personal experience but only through those ideas which the deprivation of pleasures hinders from enjoying. When consulting other persons, we should disregard what men esteem because of our exception which is always at hand; we disregard them because we do not know pleasure in them by experience. All such altercation ceases when he [Solomon] converses with us. Solomon is the one speaking here, the third king of [M.644] Israel whom the Lord had chosen after Saul and David. He received the kingship from his father and extended his rule which brought him renown among the Israelites. Solomon no longer subjected peoples through battle; by conducting himself peacefully and with full authority, he did not devote his energy towards anything not belonging to him. In this way nothing hindered his

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pleasure. Prosperity springs up with cupidity and leisure degenerates into pleasure. Nothing involuntary hinders the course of our life with regard to pleasure because Ecclesiastes was wise in other matters as well as being acquainted with pleasure. He claimed [J.307] to know the efforts needed to attain pleasure and accomplished everything which he had enumerated [cf. Eccl.2], an experience which taught him that vanity is the common end of men's' pursuits. Ecclesiastes sets forth the order in his narrative when during his youth he first had leisure for personal training, for attention to such labors does not indicate laxity. But the Spirit uses free will, a movement proper to our nature, to increase knowledge if a person is to succeed in his endeavors. Thus wisdom grows not by considering reason which closely regards passion and unreason when it comes to that deception arising from corporeal enjoyment; rather it is knowledge about vanity through experience of these endeavors.

- (1:16)** Such is the aim of our inquiry up to this point. It is time now to now examine Ecclesiastes' words in their context: "I spoke in my heart saying, 'behold, I am increased'" [1.16]. "Since I have seen," Ecclesiastes says, "my great power and have also understood the splendor of my reign all at once, I realized that the fleeting things which I had laboriously attained do not constitute a happy life; they can be obtained only [J.308] by pain and sweat." Therefore Ecclesiastes says "I spoke in my heart saying, 'behold, I am increased,'" and "I have acquired wisdom." "By amassing power I have grown by the addition of wisdom and said to myself that I must be greater than kings before me and must excel them in wisdom." "I have acquired wisdom beyond all who were before me in Jerusalem, so that I have understood how these things are" [1.16]. Who does not know that wisdom comes from the knowledge of other persons who had applied themselves to it? Ecclesiastes says, "My heart knew much wisdom and knowledge"
- (1:17)** [1.17]; "I have not acquired these by my own efforts." Rather, "I have applied my heart to know wisdom and knowledge" to learn these things only through effort and meditation. But "I knew parables and understanding" [M.645], that is, comparisons made through analogy enables one to comprehend transcendent reality.

Ecclesiastes claims [J.309] that his knowledge is self-taught: "I have known parables and knowledge as the Lord teaches in the Gospel where he brings to light the reality of the kingdom [of heaven] whether through a pearl [Mt. 13.45], treasure, [vs.44], marriage [22.2], grain [vs.31], leaven [vs.33]" or any other matter he wishes to bring to our attention. [Christ] says that these objects do not constitute the kingdom but through analogy he speaks of things transcending our comprehension because these analogies, like sparks or symbols, are parables to his listeners. Ecclesiastes says "This also is waywardness [proairesis, literally, "choice"] of spirit, for the abundance of knowledge

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(1:17,18)

is abundance of wisdom for me" [1.17-18] so that if I were wise, I would be neither ignorant nor be far from finding what is profitable. Knowledge consists in wisdom and allows us to pass better judgment, a fact which certainly requires exertion for those persons who are zealous in their pursuit. "He who increases knowledge will increase sorrow" [1.8]. When a person has attained this knowledge, he condemns pleasure as vanity.

(2:1)

Ecclesiastes next states "I said in my heart, 'Come now, I will prove you with mirth, and behold, you have good things, and behold, this also is vanity'" [2.1]. He does not immediately submit himself to such an experience nor has he tasted a more severe, solemn life to obliterate pleasure; rather, Ecclesiastes experienced [J.310] such things and pursued a sober, constant course of action which yields wisdom for those who pursue it. Ecclesiastes shrinks away from sense delights because passion does not attract him to these vanities; he believes that knowledge of the true good confers perception to anyone faithful to it. From the beginning the enemy indulges in laughter and mirth and calls passion anything mad or deranged. Anything else is rightly called laughter for it is irrational and has no purpose such as merriment which is unbecoming to the body such as agitated breathing, commotion of one's entire body, facial contortions, bearing of teeth, gums and palate, twisting of neck and the uncontrollable breaking of a strained voice accompanied by short breaths of air. What can this be except madness? For this reason Ecclesiastes says, "I said to laughter, 'It is mad'" [2.1] as if he were to say to laughter, "You are insane, irrational and spontaneously impart [J.311] through passion an ugly, distorted form on the soul." "I said to mirth, 'Why do you do this'" [2.2]? That is to say, I am at enmity with pleasure. I am suspicious [M.648] of its approach as though it were a thief who secretly entered my soul's inner chamber even though I have not allowed it to grasp my mind. If I had known that pleasure were a beast coming to snatch away my senses, I would immediately resist and say to this servile, irrational pleasure, "Why are you weakening the virility of my nature? Why are you debilitating my soul's strength? Why are you corrupting my thoughts? Why cast a gloom over the clarity of my reason?"

(2:2)

(2:3)

Having uttered these words, Ecclesiastes continues, "I examined whether my heart would excite my flesh as with wine" [2.3]. That is to say, our attention to thoughts becomes stronger than impulses of the flesh. Nature is not at war with itself, but our mind chooses things other than the flesh's attractions to make our flesh subject and obedient to our rational soul [J.312] because we have been drawn and consumed by [pleasure] which has the same intensity as thirst. Wine does not remain in a cup after a thirsty person has drunk it but is consumed quickly and with vigor. For me this action is certain and is an unimpeded way to knowledge of created things. "My heart guided me in wisdom" [2.3], enabling me both to prevail against the rebellion of pleasures and to

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attain gladness. And so continues the rest of the text. Therefore the person who earnestly applies himself to knowledge and does not occupy himself with vanity searches out the good and does not fail in his judgment of the good upon finding it. He is self-sufficient and does not allow temporal matters to affect his life; he pursues the good proper to every age in life, its beginning, middle and end. "Until I should see of what kind is the good to the sons of men which they do under the sun all the days of their lives" [2.3]. The pursuits of the flesh contain brief moments of happiness even though they entice our senses with present enjoyments. Nothing pertaining to the body should be viewed as a hinderance; nevertheless, the pleasure obtained from drinking ends with satiety, and [J.313] the fullness which results from eating quenches our appetite. In similar fashion, if any other desire fade away, it returns and is satisfied. Anything related to our senses does not last forever nor maintains the same condition. One benefit belongs to an infant while another to a youth. The same is valid with respect to a person in the prime of his life as well as for an older person and one near death. "I," however, said Ecclesiastes, "have sought the good proper to youth and every other stage of life. We are never satiated; rather, appetite [M.649] is common to us all while passion flowers with enjoyment and is not circumscribed by the attainment of its desire." But inasmuch as we perceive the good in pleasure, any delight sets desire aflame, for pleasure is united to desire and is always attractive to each stage of our growth. Neither is the good associated with instability; it provides instruction and is a model in both prosperous and calamitous situations whether they occur at night or day, travelling, on the sea, at work or rest, ruling or serving or in any of life's circumstances. Neither does the good suffer diminution or grown in anything which may befall us [J.314] whether it happens to be harmful or beneficial. In my opinion this is the true good which Solomon seeks and which men do under the sun while they are alive. For me it is nothing more than the work of faith common to all men who wish to have it abide throughout their entire lives. This is the good work done in us in Christ Jesus our Lord, to whom be glory forever. Amen.

The Third Homily

(1:13)

It is time to examine what Ecclesiastes now teaches us. We have learned at the outset that he who summons every creature, seeks the lost, gathers the scattered into one and ponders over this earthly existence which lies under heaven. This region, as Ecclesiastes states [1.13], is the realm of [J.315] deception, vanity and insubstantiality. We have learned in the second homily through the person of Solomon about his condemnation of pleasure and passion that we may worthily relinquish both their strong ability to excite us and their forms which men eagerly pursue.

What do we learn from this third homily? I think it especially applies to the Church and the failure of its members to live up to their confession, for the passion of shame gives birth to innumerable unbecoming activities. However, shame can be a great, powerful shield to ward off sin. I think that God bestowed this shield upon our nature to keep our souls from evil conduct. Shame and disgrace have a certain compatibility which serves to deflect sin, provided that they are used for the soul's disposition. Shame, not fear, often instructs us to shun unbecoming behavior, but it rightly chastens persons who have fallen into disgrace [J.316] not to commit this sin again. If we wish to describe [M.652] the difference between shame and disgrace, we may call the latter is an intensification of the former, whereas shame is somewhat milder than disgrace. We see both their difference and similarity in the color of a person's face which manifests the various passions. Red indicates shame, a natural sympathy between soul and body, where the heat around one's heart boils up to manifest itself on the face. This bright, red, livid color appears when a person commits a fault, for fear combines with bile to produce blushing. Passion of this kind belongs to persons who admit their improper behavior yet no longer indulge in it. If this is so and if the book [of Ecclesiastes] says that passion can prevent us from transgressions [J.317], we should consider the Church's teaching as expressed through the confession of sins because this practice arms the soul against falling by mean of the shield offered by shame. Just as gluttony collects ill humors in oneself and a hot iron cures inflammation resulting from a cut as though it were a teaching for the next life while keeping in mind the body's cauterized wound, so the shame produced by passion will instruct a person for this future life if he accuses himself and reveals the secrets of his memory.

Such are the Church's teachings which we now find in the book of Ecclesiastes. The Church freely proclaims them before everyone as though they were written on a column so that ignorance and silence of them may be more glorious than speaking. Ecclesiastes says that it is impossible to accurately state whether or not these [doctrines] he has in mind are for our benefit. He utters words about virtue, yet a person

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considering them does not willingly [J.318] appropriate them. But if from personal experience Ecclesiastes condemns the apparent existence [of vanity] to make us avoid a similar situation, or if he freely rejects the enjoyment coming from pleasure in order to diligently train his senses through unpleasant experiences, let us willingly pay attention to his words and draw our own conclusions. We will now respond to anyone who claims that Ecclesiastes' experience results in pleasure. Persons who traverse the sea and explore its depths in the hope of finding pearls exert themselves in profitable labor, not in pleasure. If Solomon [M.653] resembles these men and devotes himself to fishing, he becomes submerged in pleasure; he is not filled with sea salt which to me represents pleasure but seeks that which is profitable for his mind in these depths. In my opinion this example may blunt our bodily inclinations by [J.319] restraining our desires because nature always has in store more vehement movements to hinder this process. A teacher faithful in such matters feels that people are no longer prone to detestable behavior once he has taught them the vanity of their experiences. He says that physicians are especially inclined to this when they diagnose illnesses in different bodies. Doctors who impart more sound advice for healing know that they have already been cured and conduct themselves as a result of this experience.

(2:4)

Let us now see what he who had suffered in his own life now says for our healing. "I enlarged my work, I built my houses" [2.4]. The text begins with a condemnation, for God does not perform this work but my own work which "I enlarged," that is, the one delighting my senses. This work is of one general kind yet is subtly divided into many to serve pleasure. Once a person has immersed himself in material things, his eye rushes to every place where pleasure comes to birth. Just as water flows through many channels from one fountain and does not diminish by dividing into many channels [J.320], so one pleasure with its various manifestations flows everywhere in life's different pursuits when united to the necessities of any given circumstance.

Life has provided a necessary habitation for human nature; it is more feeble than the irregularities of warmth and cold, thereby requiring that we have a house in which to live. However, pleasure does violence by transgressing the bounds of its usefulness. If a person does not provide for his body's needs but has his eyes fixed on pleasure, he suffers as a consequence for it because he did not allow heaven to come under his roof; no longer can he have the sun's rays within his dwelling. Therefore he extends the circumference of his house as much as possible, making its area as big as the earth itself. He makes his walls exceedingly high and arranges the house's interior with various kinds of furniture to enhance its beauty. Whether or not a stone comes from [J.321] Lacaena, Thessalos, or Carystos, or iron in the floor is from Nilica and Numidia, Phrygian rock is included whose purple hue combines with

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marble's whiteness. It provides various delights for greedy eyes [M.656] by being an enormous diffusion of color depicted in white. How numerous must be the shapes and forms cut both by water and iron and by men's hands who spent day and night sawing these objects! None of their efforts has satisfied their craving for creating vain ornaments; furthermore, they use various dyes for tainting the purity of glass in order to enhance its visual appeal. How can anyone claim that the skillful work [J.322] of carving tools can change trees back into trees again which yield branches, foliage and fruit? I will remain silent with regard to the gold included in this ornamentation and the light, thin material used as a coating. Greedy eyes look upon such work along with the vain adornment of ivory above entrances where nails or similar devices serve to fasten gold or silver. Who call tell of the house's floors resplendent with various colored stones which provide pleasure for one's feet? This is unnecessary for living, but greed is still not satisfied despite its search for such useless things. Some buildings are made for public walkways; still others are for strolling around in while others include [J.323] gates. Flamboyant doors and brightly colored gates are useless except for making an impression. Splendid fountains provide abundant water; the gymnasium is lavishly constructed with different kinds of marble; colonnades support the entire house with pillars from Numidia, Thessalika, or Soenita; copper on statues is fashioned into as many forms as greed desires; marble idols and pictures on tablets induce the eyes to commit fornication; art reveals through [J.324] imitation that which is invisible and whatever can then be seen is a cause for admiration and beauty.

How can anyone individually recount all the more endeavors which are preferable and to which man applies himself and are subject to condemnation and reproach? The more material structures abound in their magnificence, the more the soul's ugliness is censured. A person who attends to himself truly adorns his own dwelling so that when God abides there, he has various kinds of material which contribute to this [M.657] building. I know that gold shines in such works when unearthed by insights from scripture and that purified silver represents divine eloquence whose splendor shines forth through the truth. The splendor of the various stones adorning this temple's walls and pavement are the virtues, a true image of the beauty adorning this house. Let self-control lay down the pavement since it does not allow the building's inhabitant to be troubled by the dust of earthly mindedness. Let the hope for heaven adorn the roof. The soul's eye does not gaze upon images fashioned by chisels [J.325]; rather, it will see the archetypal beauty adorned with something of greater value than gold and silver.

If we must describe the masonry, then let incorruptibility and impassibility mold the house which justice and freedom will adorn. Let humility and patience shine in another part of the house along with piety

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befitting God. Let love [agape], the noble craftsman, fashion all these virtues in a marvelous way. If you desire baths in your house for cleansing the stains of your soul, you can use that bath which the great David delighted in each night [Ps 6,7.2]. Let the columns supporting the soul's courtyard not be of Phrygian marble or porphyry but stability in every good which is far more precious. This house forbids statues and pictures which [J.326] are deceptive imitations of truth because it already has an abundance of images of the truth. If you desire a place in which to walk about, you have the commandments. Wisdom says "I walk in the ways of righteousness and am conversant with the paths of judgment" [Prov 8.20]. How lovely it is when such [adornments] arouse the soul to carefully examine the commandments, to be trained in them and make us return to the place from which we started! This occurs when we fulfill the commandments which spur us on both a second and a third time, for the least detail of their piety never wearies us. The person who adorns his own dwelling cares little about earthly affairs. He is unconcerned with metals, does not traverse the sea to India to purchase ivory nor does he hire skilled workmen; rather, one's own house furnishes such material whose wealth consists in the exercise of free will.¹ Our human nature yoked to the flesh offers healing provided that it is not deprived of any need. If necessary, we must warm this [J.327] chamber [the body] alone and provide it with shade when the sun burns us. A garment provides covering for the naked body; it does not have to be purple, scarlet, gold thread nor silk from Seres whose garments are woven from gold and purple. Similarly, food relieves hunger and provides pleasure by means of culinary techniques. If we are content with few advantages, our needs are cared for while we glorify God's work, not our own, so we need not make public our vanity as we learn from the words, "I enlarged my work" [2.4], not God's. Compelled by vain desires instead of need, I enlarged the dwelling of my flesh.

We correctly assume that the text [Ecclesiastes] offers further elucidation to what we have just read, that is, mental incoherence and the indignity of drunkenness. "I enlarged my work, built my houses" to which Ecclesiastes adds "I planted [J.328] my vineyards." The words "I enlarged" and what follows commonly mean abundance. The text does not mean the expansion of personal needs by the planting of vines. "I planted my vineyards," that is, I have provided material to burn fuel through the increase of pleasures because my mind sank low just as strong drink covers the mind with earth. "I planted my vines." I have not exercised self-control, Ecclesiastes says, like the drunken Noah [Gen 9.20+] because this lovely plant is both an object of pity and ridicule after it is stripped.²

1 NB: the Migne text does not resume until J.328.12.

2 NB: the Migne text resumes here.

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The more well-disposed sons of Noah pitied their father's indecency while others laughed and ridiculed him. Vineyards contain an entire list of passions which are [M.660] aggravated by wine, for who does not know that an immoderate use of wine fuels undiscipline? It includes a multitude of pleasures, youthful outrage, unbecoming old age [J.329], disgrace for women, a drug for madness, insanity, obnoxiousness for the soul, death to the mind and alienation from virtue. Drunkenness produces unreasonable laughter and crying, spontaneous tears, hollow boasting, irrational fear, indifference to fear, no reason for arrogance, thoughtless generosity and the promise of unfulfilled work. We may omit further unbecoming behavior such as indecent drowsiness, drunken stupor, unsteady feet and the twisting of one's neck which cannot remain steady. What kind of abomination makes a person commit incest with one's daughter? How was Lot deceived [Gen 19.30-38] to perpetrate a deed of which he was unaware? What new names were mysteriously given to those children? How did the mothers of such a polluted birth become sisters of their own children? How did a son have both a father and grandfather? Did not wine, which makes the mind irrational, cause this tragedy of disobedience? Did not inebriation form the subject of this story [J.330] and its excesses contribute to the invention of fables? The text says that Noah's children made him drunk [Gen 19.33,35]. The story refers this tragedy to life, namely, that drunkenness can rob us of our senses. Oh, how those women carry off wine with evil intent from the Sodomites! What miserable friendship they offer their father from such a wicked cup! How much better it would have been to corrupt that wine along with the Sodomites before the tragedy occurred! With so many examples of evil stemming from wine each day, Ecclesiastes shamelessly admits that he not only used wine but made certain to have it in abundance. "I have planted my vineyards." "I did not lack flourishing vines, that is, a spiritual, fruitful vine entwined with the branches of life and tendrils of love united to my own; they are adorned with graceful habits and nourished with the sweet, mature clusters of virtue instead of leaves" [2819]. [J.331 & M.661] As Proverbs says [12.11], he who plants these vines in his own soul tends the wine which gladdens the heart and works his own land [Sir 40.20]. The law requires from this farmer of wine-producing thoughts that he eliminate spurious roots planted with virtues, irrigate his soul with doctrine and cut away with a critical mind anything superficial or unreasonable. Blessed is this man who, because of his husbandry, presses his cluster in the cup of wisdom!

(2:5) But the person whose mind is fixed on earth does not know about this and what it includes. He lavishes exquisite beauty upon these gardens and orchards [Eccl 2.5]. What need is there need for so many orchards instead of one? What use to me is a garden's produce whose food is for the sick? If I had been in paradise [paradeisos], I would not desire many orchards [paradeisoi]. If I lived well and ate solid food, I would not bother with vegetables, food appropriate for those who are sick. But

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once pleasure unites itself to necessity, desire transgresses its bounds [J.332] by possessing extravagant homes with expensive roofs and open air enclosures whose space provide delight. Cultivated trees are always green and bushy; they take the place of thatching in order that the enclosure might enhance the home along with every kind of skillfully cultivated herb which clothes the earth's surface. Thus each room in the house strikes one's eyes as pleasant. At all times and in every season one may see delightful things: vegetation in the winter, flowers blossoming before their season, climbing vines entwining themselves to other branches and elegant ivy growing around trees and blending with other growth. The pleasure offered to eye and tongue signify a union obtained from different plants. All these plants to which horticultural skill is applied are not required to support life but are for our undisciplined desires.

(2:6) Ecclesiastes says that he cultivated [J.333] these plants in gardens and orchards. "I have planted every kind of fruit tree" [2.5], that is, many kinds of trees. The delights of this open enclosure and roofed in space are irrigated to yield fruit which their respective habitats require: on earth that which belongs to it, in the air through trees and in the water whatever belongs to the sea. In order to both delight and deceive one's eyes, [M.664] the pool is constructed for swimming and washing while the overflow is put at the service of making orchards blossom. "I have made pools of water to water timber-bearing wood" [2.6]. If the orchard's fountain were mine, that is, the teaching of virtues which irrigate the soul, I would hold in contempt the transient waters of this world whose pleasures pass away. Therefore, nothing can be better than the divine fountain which irrigate and make the soul's virtues grow. It flows in a narrow channel [J.334] to make a grove of good deeds flourish in our souls through our Lord Jesus Christ, to whom be glory forever. Amen.

The Fourth Homily

(2:7)

The topic of [Ecclesiastes'] confession detains us because for by speaking about himself he lists all those characteristics enabling us to recognize the vanity of this life. It is as though he now puts a greater censure upon men's deeds and accuses them of passion due to their arrogance. Among those things he includes is an expensive home, many vineyards, beautiful gardens, pools and orchards, do we find a person who regards himself as lord over his fellow man? "I obtained servants, maidens, servants born to me in my house" [2.7]. Do you see here a pride which makes false pretensions? Such words as these rise up against God. As prophecy has told us [Ps 118.91], all things serve [God] whose power is over them. As for the person who appropriates to himself [J.335] what belongs to God and attributes to himself power over the human race as if he were its lord, what other arrogant statement transgressing human nature makes this person regard himself as different from those over whom he rules? "I obtained servants and maidens." What are you saying? You condemn man who is free and autonomous to servitude, and you contradict God by perverting the natural law. Man, who was created as lord over the earth, you have put under the yoke of servitude as a transgressor and rebel against the divine precept. You have forgotten the limit of your authority which consists in jurisdiction over brutish animals. Scripture says that man shall rule birds, beasts, fish, four-footed animals and reptiles [Gen 1.26]. How can you transgress the servitude bestowed upon you and raise yourself against man's freedom by stripping yourself of the servitude proper to beasts? "You have subjected all things to man," the psalmist prophetically cries out [Ps 8.7-8], referring to those subject to reason as "sheep, oxen, and cattle" [M.665].

Do sheep and oxen beget [J.336] men for you? Irrational beasts have only one kind of servitude. Do these form a paltry sum for you? "He makes grass grow for the cattle and green herbs for the service of men" [Ps 103.14]. But once you have freed yourself from servitude and bondage, you desire to have others serve you. "I have obtained servants and maidens." What value is this, I ask? What merit do you see in their nature? What small worth have you bestowed upon them? What payment do you exchange for your nature which God has fashioned? God has said, "Let us make man according to our image and likeness" [Gen 1.26]. Since we are made according to God's likeness and are appointed to rule over the entire earth, tell me, who is the person who sells and buys? Only God can do this; however, it does not pertain to him at all "for the gifts of God are irrevocable" [Rom 11.29]. Because God called human nature to freedom which had become addicted to sin, he would not subject it to servitude again. If God did not subject freedom to slavery, who can deny his lordship? How does the ruler of the entire earth obtain dominion [J.337] since

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every possession requires payment? How can we properly estimate the earth in its entirety as well as its contents? If these things are inestimable, tell me, how much greater is man's value who is over them? If you mention the entire world you discover nothing equivalent to man's honor. He who knows human nature says that the world is not an adequate exchange for man's soul. When the Lord of the earth bought man, he acquired nothing more precious. He will then proclaim this surpassing possession along with the earth, island, sea and everything in them.

What is the deposit God puts down? What will he receive from the contract by which he has received possession? Does an account, written agreement or small amount of money deceive you in order to obtain the image of God? Oh, what a delusion! If the contract perishes, moths corrode the letters and dripping water brings destruction, where are your pledges of domination? I see nothing more than a title [J.338] under your control. What authority enhances your nature? It is neither time, beauty, honor nor virtue. These yield a life similarly dominated by passions of both soul and body with you as its lord: suffering and cheerfulness, joy and sadness, grief and pleasure, wrath and fear, pain and death. Do not these belong to both slave and lord who breathe the same air and look upon the sun? Does not food [M.668] nourish them both? Do not they have the same intestines? Do not both become dust in death? Is there not one standard? Is there not a common rule and a common hell? How can you who are equal in all things have superiority so that as man, you consider yourself as man's ruler and say "I have servants and maidens" as if they were goats or cattle? When Ecclesiastes said that "I have servants and maidens" he also speaks of his prosperity in flocks and herds: "I also had abundant possessions of flocks and herds," both of which were subject to his authority.

(2:8) Ecclesiastes proceeds to mention great sins [J.339] and cries out that avarice is the root of all evil. "I collected for myself both silver and gold" [2.8]. What is more harmful than gold mixed with earth in those locations where the Creator had originally placed it? What is more advantageous for you than the earth's bounty which the Creator has made? Do not fruit trees contribute to your nourishment? Then why do you violate the bounds of authority? Show what the Creator has bestowed upon you such as mining, digging, burning and gathering what you have not scattered. This is not an accusation against gathering metal from the earth to manufacture money but since the mind cannot be free of avarice, Ecclesiastes adds "The special treasures of kings and princes" [2.8]. Kings gather wealth from provinces, a clear indication that they impose burdens, collect taxes and take money from their subjects. And so Ecclesiastes says that he gathers gold and silver. But whether or not this is true, I know that a great benefit lies in store for the person who collects such material possessions. [J.340] Let us exchange neither a

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mina, drachma or talent with avaricious persons; instead, let us hasten to turn everything into gold. As soon as possible let us exchange the earth, sand, mountains plains and vales for this material. What contribution do these have for happiness? If one sees in the universe what he now beholds on a small scale, how can such wealth benefit the soul or body? How can gold make a person wise, ingenious, contemplative, skilled, dear to God, pure, lacking passion and free from evil? Or if this is not the case, what good is there in being strong in body or in seeing one's life prolonged for many years and free from illness and harm? However, [M.669] no one is so vain nor inattentive to human nature to realize that these benefits are available for men even though a great amount of money is available for everyone.

We now observe many wealthy persons living pitiful lives; if it were not for people capable of healing them, they would not deem life worth living. If neither body nor soul benefits from [J.341] our opinion of gold's abundance, then how much more futile is it to prove gold's value to persons who possess it! For what material advantage is our lack of taste, smell, hearing or the sense of touch? As for me, let no one offer food or clothing in exchange for gold. The person who gives bread or clothing for gold exchanges a benefit for something useless in order to live, whereas anyone who takes nourishing food instead of gold lives. What profit, advise, lesson, warning or consolation for bodily pains can we derive from such material aggrandizement? A greedy person counts money, stores it up, signs documents, seals them, denies requests and swears falsely to another unfaithful person. Such is his happiness, the goal of his efforts and pleasure, as long as prosperity fuels his false oaths. However, this person claims that gold's appearance is lovely; it is more beautiful than the color of fire, the star's beauty and the sun's rays. Who hinders your enjoyment so that [J.342] you must provide pleasure for your eyes through gold's beautiful color? Yet Ecclesiastes says that fire goes out, the sun sets and our pleasure derived from such beauty is transitory. Tell me, how does gold differ from lead when it becomes dark? But Ecclesiastes says that necklaces, buckles, girdles, armlets, crowns and such adornments come neither from fire nor the stars. Trust in material objects leads to the highest form of vanity. With this in mind I now ask what type of person craves gold decorations, earrings, skins which adorn the neck or any other bodily limb? The body assumes the gleam of gold's splendor when we adorn ourselves with it. Anyone who sees a person wearing gold thinks it were for sale as in a market, but the person wearing it [J.343] is more concerned about its nature. If gold is well-wrought or carved, even though its color is green or has fiery gems, it does not assume any of these accretions; rather, if we suffer any kind of mutilation, or if our eyes exude pus [M.672], or if a scar horribly marks our cheek, such deformity belongs to appearance only and gold's gleam cannot cover it over; also, if the body suffers any calamity, gold cannot relieve its distress.

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Is there any beautiful object worth pursuing which brings neither health to the body nor relief to pain? And what about deceived persons who cling to gold with their whole heart even though such possessions trouble their consciences? What do they promise themselves when they have something of so great a value? If they could change gold's substance, would they also desire to change their humanity into gold, a substance which lacks reason, intelligence and sensation as well as being pale in color, heavy, speechless and without soul and feeling? I do not think they would choose these things nor crave after [J.344] gold. If people of sound mind curse the properties of inanimate nature, what insanity makes them commit murder and steal to possess such a useless object? Not only do they carry this out, but they fail to see how it differs from the fruit [tokos] of evil thoughts, robbery or murder. How does a burglar differ from other robbers when he establishes himself as lord by committing murder or when he possesses what does not belong to him through usury [tokos]? Oh, how terrible is this usury, the name of a thief! Oh, what a bitter marriage and evil wedlock of which our human nature is ignorant while the disease of avarice has begun anew in lifeless persons! How grievous is that conception which gives birth to such usury!

Only animate beings have the distinction between male and female. God the Creator said "Increase and multiply" [Gen 1.28] that one generation might give birth to a succeeding one. But from what kind of marriage does the birth [tokos] of gold derive? What sort of conception brings it to fruition? I am aware of the pains belonging to such a birth from the prophet's words, "Behold, he has travailed with unrighteousness, has conceived trouble and has brought forth iniquity" [Ps 7.14]. Such is that birth which avarice yields [J.345], iniquity begets and hate delivers. When urgently pressed, the person who always conceals abundance swears not to be pregnant with a purse and begets usury [tokos] out of desire for gain. He assumes the ambition of a money-lender devoted to material gain in the same way a person extinguishes a flame with oil. The calamity of a loan has no remedy; instead, it becomes worse. Just as arable land becomes dry and automatically produces thorns, so do the usuries [M.673] of the arrogant abound. A person extends his hand with money in the same way a fishing line conceals a hook with bait; similarly, a wretched person eager for wealth is drawn by a concealed hook. Such are the benefits of usury. Anyone who forcefully takes or steals provisions is a violent and rapacious person, but the person who reveals in public the injustice he committed in contracts and so bears bitter witness to the distress it caused and who acknowledges his [J.346] transgression is loving, kind, a guardian and the like. Gain which results from stealing is called theft, a euphemism for the bitter deprivation of a debtor. Such miserable persons are indeed despicable: "I collected for myself both silver and gold" [2.8], but a wise person learns from what Ecclesiastes has listed and enumerated. In this way we may learn from his experience of the

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need to guard against evil before its assault and not to be associated with thieves and harmful beasts by taking heed of such dangers before they occur.

The divine Apostle [Paul] clearly defines the passion of covetousness as the root of all evils [1Tm 6.10]. Just as we must rid ourselves of any juice which causes corruption, rot and inflammation, the same applies to a harmful, corruptible humor which devours a sore. Thus sickness rushes upon [J.347] persons fond of money and attracted to licentiousness; disgrace is attributed to abundance of gold and silver and follows closely upon sickness. Ecclesiastes says "I have procured for myself singing men and singing women [2.8]," or butlers and female cupbearers, the delight of guests. These terms sufficiently describe passion which, in turn, induces sickness with regard to money. Oh what disgraceful zeal! The rush of pleasure crashes upon us like a two-fold torrent flooding the soul that we may see and hear evil. Singing distracts us from hearing while appearances captivate our vision. Thus the soothing harmony of female voices introduce passion; then appearances, like a war machine assaulting the eyes, dissolves and overthrows us by songs. However, wine is the leader of this troop which, like an evil bowman, strikes us down with two arrows directed to the ears and eyes, the focal points of pleasure. The arrow of hearing is singing while the arrow of vision consists in appearances. The term "butlers" is not merely a name but derives from its function. Thus [M.676] free-flowing wine [J.348] and a youth adorned for this service who is either in woman's clothing or happens to be a woman herself, contribute to enflame the revelers. What is the result of all this? We must remain silent and not proceed further concerning those persons who set pleasure as a goal, take care to enliven their songs with music and to adorn servants with garments. In this way remembrance of their actions may not lacerate the wounds of other more afflicted persons through our condemnation. Gold and silver thus act as delightful snares for such persons.

Because of the affliction resulting from pleasure, scripture calls it a serpent [Gen 3.1] whose entire body enters once it pokes its head through a hole in the wall. What do I mean? Nature furnishes a habitation for man but pleasure [J.349] creeps into the soul through a hole whose immoderate, extravagant need for ornamentation attracts one's attention. Then that beast, pleasure, creeps into the beautiful gardens, vineyards, baths and orchards. Next the serpent drags us away by our fondness for money resulting in intemperance, the last and worst aspect of pleasure's savage nature. But just as the serpent cannot pull with its tail--its rough scales naturally [J.350] resist anything it draws--so we cannot expel the creeping of pleasure from our soul's extremities unless we firmly resist evil's first impulses. Because of this the teacher of virtue [Ecclesiastes] bids us to observe the serpents'

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head, the beginning of evil, which is harmless, provided that we do not let him in. The person hostile to pleasure is not subject to individual assaults of passion whereas another person who has given a foothold to evil has accepted the beast in its entirety. Ecclesiastes expressed in public the passions which he once eagerly pursued, thereby summing up his feelings on such matters. When he said at the beginning, "I have enlarged my work" and now adds what he has acquired he says "I have become great" [2.9]. Ecclesiastes thus shows that his knowledge does not derive from insignificant, contradictory elements; instead, he called upon his experience that his memory [of the past] may not be the same as his predecessors.

Ecclesiastes says "I have become great" and adds "I advanced [M.677] beyond all who were before me in Jerusalem." Having already been trained in all wisdom for the danger at hand, he now sets forth his goal. "My wisdom remained with me" [2.9]. These words reveal that every enjoyable thought with regard to wisdom brought me the best of anything available [J.351]. Sight was united to longing, and choice of visual delights has brought me enjoyment. Nothing which I had once pondered provides enjoyment now, but I do possess pleasant recollections; the only benefit left for me consists in enjoyable thoughts about my former possessions.

(2:10) "I did not withhold my heart from all my mirth, for my heart rejoiced in all my labor, and this was my portion in all my labor" [2.10]. Here Ecclesiastes says that he possessed a portion of his labor. After having thoroughly surveyed everything which bestows enjoyment, that is, the beauty of buildings, vineyards, gardens, pools, orchards, authority over people, wealth of possessions and parties, Ecclesiastes names all the delights which he knows and has scrutinized in his wisdom. Once he says that we have sought satisfaction, that our eyes hit upon pleasant sights and that nothing hinders our souls' desire, he interprets the first words of his prologue, namely, that all things [J.352] are vanity. While pondering these matters, Ecclesiastes says that men's' senses and pursuits are vain.

(2:11) "I have looked," Ecclesiastes says, "on all my works which my hands have made and on my labor which I have labored to perform, and behold, all was vanity and waywardness of spirit, and there is no advantage under the sun" [2.11]. Each sense perception has its limits and operation under the sun, but further on he says that the senses cannot comprehend transcendent reality. Ecclesiastes teaches us that we should not admire wealth, honor, authority, banquets, parties and so forth. Instead, he sees that their one end is vanity whose abundance is unlimited. When tracing formless letters in water [M.600], this act of writing only has existence while we perform it because our hand always follows the water's surface and smooth's over the impressions just

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made. Our exertions and energy on behalf of pleasure [J.353] are similar. Once the action ceases, pleasure is blotted out and nothing remains; neither do those persons who have experienced pleasure have any trace of it. Such is the meaning of Ecclesiastes' words when he says that nothing remains under the sun for those who labor, for their end is vanity. May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, to whom be glory forever, free us from such vanity. Amen.

The Fifth Homily

Now the great leader of the Church [Christ] indoctrinates us into loftier teachings. The preceding words have purified the soul and have banished the vanity of cupidity from men's' desire. Ecclesiastes leads our minds to the truth by pointing out the grief resulting from vanity and by lifting its burden from our shoulders. May the Church be learned in this teaching and realize that [J.354] the beginning of a virtuous life consists in alienation from evil! The great David introduced a pure manner of living by means of the psalms; he did not begin [the psalter] with the perfection of blessedness. David did not first say that blessedness consists in doing all things well; rather, he compared a [blessed] person to a tree rooted by flowing waters, always green in good works and one who gathers at appropriate times the fruit of his own life [Ps 1.3]. However, the beginning of blessedness consists in the rejection of evil since we must first be cleansed from evil's filth. Almost immediately Ecclesiastes excludes vanity in the same way that once we have cleansed our bodies of illness by diligent care, the boon of health spontaneously appears. He then digresses on vanity saying that sensation is a poor criterion for the good because it subjects our vision to insubstantial pursuits and obtains concupiscence from bodily pleasure. Ecclesiastes thus shows that our choice and desire must be effective and real, ever constant and alien to all vain thoughts.

- (2:12)** [J.355] "I looked that I might see wisdom" [2.12]. In order to accurately see what I desired, I first considered madness and foolishness. By making comparisons we obtain better insight into men's' pursuits. Ecclesiastes calls wisdom "counsel:" "Who is the man who will follow after [M.681] counsel in all things that he may employ it?" He teaches human wisdom, namely, the following of true wisdom and presents those things which have substance and are not subject to vanity. Indeed, this is the summit of human wisdom. In my opinion true wisdom and counsel are simply another kind of wisdom which provides for creation by which God makes all things. As the prophet says, "You have made all things in wisdom" [Ps 103.24]. However, Christ is the power wisdom of God in whom all things are made and ordained [1Cor 1.24]. If human wisdom consists in the comprehension of true works of wisdom and counsel, for me the work of that counsel or wisdom is incorruptibility, the soul's happiness, fortitude, righteousness, prudence and any name understood with regard to virtue which we might add to the knowledge of good things. [J.356] "After I have seen these things," Ecclesiastes says, "and judged in a scale being with non-being, I discovered the difference between wisdom and foolishness as when I had compared light with darkness. It seems to me that this example is a favorable judgment for that which is beautiful." Because darkness has no substance while light does (if nothing obstructs the sun's rays, we have no darkness), this example shows that evil does not exist by itself

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but is a deprivation of the good, while the good always remains fully itself and is not preceded by deprivation. However, anything contrary to the good lacks substance; it cannot exist by itself nor be complete because evil is a deprivation, not a substance. Therefore the difference between light and darkness, wisdom and foolishness, is similar. The good as a whole takes the name of wisdom from a part, and the word "foolishness" explains the nature of evil.

(2:14)

But what profit is the good acquired by gain unless our teacher [Christ] shows us how to acquire it in the right way? In order to partake of the good, let us pay attention to our teacher. "The wise man's [J.357] eyes are in his head" [2.14]. What does this mean? Does an animal exist without eyes in its head, whether it lives in the sea, earth or the sky? Eyes for such animals are important and are located in the head. Why, then, does the head of a wise person have eyes? Does this mean that an analogy exists between members of the soul and the body? Just as the head presides over [M.684] the entire body, so does the soul hold pre-eminence as the governing principle. Similarly, just as the base of the foot is the heel, so the base of the soul is united to the body, the source of our senses and operative facilities. Whenever the senses dominate our soul's capacity for vision and contemplation, the eyes assume their opposite condition, the heel, and force the senses to look downwards instead of on high. If vanity consists in those characteristics of what has been subjected, then the person who raises his eyes to his own head which, according to Paul is Christ [1Cor 11.3], his clarity of vision would be most blessed [J.358] and not obscured by evil. The great Paul and others like him have eyes in their heads, and they all live, move and exist in Christ [Acts 17.28]. Just as a person cannot see darkness in the light, so a person whose eye is in Christ cannot fix his gaze on vanity. Therefore the person with eyes in his head (for we understand the head to be the principle of all things) has them fixed on every virtue (for Christ is the perfection of virtue), truth, incorruptibility and good.

"The eyes of a wise person are in his head, but the fool walks in darkness" [2.14]. He who does not set his lamp on a lampstand but places it under his bed [Mk 4.21] makes the light dark and creates an insubstantial reality. Vanity consists in insubstantiality; darkness is also called vanity. The foolish, corporeal, fleshly soul sees nothing while gazing upon these things because keen vision is truly darkness with regard to such preoccupations. Do you see those attentive, subtle persons whom in this life we call learned in the law? They bring to light their own injustice by witnesses, advocates, assistants and judges while they perform evil deeds and escape punishment. Who cannot but admire [J.359] their subtlety and experience? Yet they are blind if they gaze with that eye which looks heavenward and is present in the head of persons who truly exist. They are truly blind because they adorn

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themselves with that heel bitten by the serpent; regarding those things which are below, they imprint on themselves the lessons of sin. "For he who loves iniquity hates his own soul" [Ps 10.5], and everything considered blessed by men is more pitiable than any misfortune. On the other hand, how many are those who are concerned with heavenly blessings and the contemplation of true reality! They seem blind and unintelligent with respect to material concerns as was Paul who boasted about himself and considered himself as foolish for the sake of Christ. "We are fools for Christ's [M.685] sake" [1Cor 4.10], that is, we are blind to this life here below while our eyes are fixed on heaven and on our head [Christ]. Because of this Paul lacked shelter, food, was poor, a wanderer, naked and was overcome by hunger and thirst [2Cor 12.27]. But these things pertain to life here below while Paul kept his eyes fixed on heaven. However, he was raised [J.360] to the third heaven where Christ the head is. Paul had his eyes set there, rejoiced at the unutterable mysteries of paradise and gazed upon unseen, hidden realities which transcend both the senses and mind. Who would not pity Paul upon seeing his chains, his calamities and tossing about by the sea's waves while in irons [2Cor 2.23-26]? Despite his affliction, he had his eyes always fixed on the head saying "Who will separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril or the sword" [Rom 8.35]? What, then, would he say? "Who will gouge out my eyes from the head and bring them down to be trampled underfoot?" Paul also bids us to imitate him by looking above [Col 3.1] to that place where we must have our eyes in the head [Christ].

If we learn how eyes are situated in the head of a wise person, we would shun foolishness which is darkness to those who walk in this life. Ecclesiastes says "The foolish man walks about in darkness" [2.14]. As the prophet claims [Ps 13.1], the man who says in his heart that there is no God is stupid; he is corrupt and abominable in all his activities. The text [J.361] proceeds to speak about faint-hearted, cowardly persons who regard death as something grievous while those who pursue the loftier goals of a virtuous life gain nothing because both lives share a common end and do not avoid death by following a more edifying kind of life. Therefore Ecclesiastes makes objections as though they came from himself; once again he pursues the absurdity of those who object that they are inattentive to the nature of things and teaches us virtue's surpassing nature with respect to evil so that no equality is present in death. Indeed, good and evil deeds make a difference at the end [of life]. Ecclesiastes' objection runs as follows: "I know that one end shall befall them all. And I said in my heart, 'As is the end of the fool, so shall it be to me, even to me; and to what purpose have I gained wisdom?' I said in my heart 'This is also vanity because the fool speaks of his abundance; both the wise man and the fool are not remembered forever, and both now in the coming [M.688] of days all things are forgotten. How shall the wise man die with the fool'" [2.14-16]? With

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these words Ecclesiastes considers any worthwhile pursuit as despicable when [J.362] he had first fervently welcomed vanity as beneficial. He claims to hate what he labored for in this life because such things have no value. He also considers events after his death because he cannot foresee the uncertainty of the future saying "So I hated life because the work that was wrought under the sun was evil before me, for all is vanity and waywardness of spirit. And I hated the whole of my labor which I took under the sun because I must leave it to the man who will come after me. And who knows whether he will be a wise man or a fool, and whether he will have power over all my labor in which I labored and wherein I grew wise under the sun? This also is vanity" [2.17-19].

Ecclesiastes utters these words in an unfavorable manner because for he thinks that one portion is in store for the person who lives virtuously and the one who contributes nothing towards this end. He says that one person has labor in wisdom, knowledge and fortitude whereas another has labor in anger and pain, that is, conditions proper to this present life. Therefore both have an equal share not only in vanity but in evil. [J.363] "So I went about to dismiss from my heart all my labor which I expended under the sun. There is such a man that his labor is in wisdom, knowledge, and fortitude yet this man shall give his portion to one who has not labored therein. This also is vanity and great wickedness. For it happens to a man in all his labor and in the purpose of his heart wherein he labors under the sun. For all his days are days of sorrow and distraction of spirit; in the night his heart also does not rest. This too is vanity" [2.20-23]. Again Ecclesiastes offers an objection to persons who esteem this life's pleasures more than a nobler form of life. He refutes this objection in his own words with a conclusion and counter proposition. The objection consists in thinking that the good lies in oneself, that is, consisting of food and drink, and Ecclesiastes responds by saying that a person is nourished not by these but by wisdom and knowledge. The benefit of [changeable] elements consists in the empty pursuit of distractions caused by the flesh. His sublime doctrine is formulated as follows: "There is nothing better for a man than that he should eat and drink and find enjoyment in his toil. This also [J.364], I saw, is from the hand of God; for apart from him who can eat or who can have enjoyment? For to the man who pleases him God gives wisdom and knowledge and joy; but to the sinner he gives the work of gathering and heaping, [M.689] only to give to one who pleases God. This also is vanity and a striving after wind" [2.24-26].

We will now briefly set forth the meaning of these words and the result of what we had considered earlier, so let us again state them and bring them into harmony with an accurate meaning. "I have said that we all share one condition and that I myself partake of foolishness. Why, then, have I devoted myself to wisdom?" Now follows Ecclesiastes' objection

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which he proposes to himself: "If everyone is subject to death and if virtue performed in wisdom cannot remove the taste of death, in vain have I striven after wisdom." What is Ecclesiastes' response? "I have spoken much in my heart that this is vanity, that the fool speaks from an abundance which is vanity. The memory of the wise man does not abide with that of the fool forever." Ecclesiastes condemns this objection as superficial and inconsequential. He considers it foolish because [J.365] it comes neither from secret places nor from wisdom's treasures; rather, it is an excretion of the mind which to be rejected like foam, for the fool speaks from abundance. Thus it is vain to use this argument and to seek another one except to persuade a person not to value appearances. For the person who utters contradictions contends from appearances, and death consists of appearances. What does Ecclesiastes say? Is there no judgment with regard to a virtuous and wicked life? Only wickedness must be slain while the good is free from bodily death. You are unaware of virtue's immortality and the death of those living in evil, for Ecclesiastes says that the memory of the wise man lives forever while that of the fool perishes. The prophet says that the famous, well-known memory of these persons will perish when, for example, he speaks of the sun [Ps 9.7]. He does not say that the memory of the wise man and the fool lasts forever, but that the wise man's life is remembered forever while the fool [J.366] suffers extinction. In the days to come all fools will be forgotten: "In the days to come all things are forgotten" [2.16].

(2:16)

If the wise man lives by wisdom and the fool is destroyed by death's oblivion, how can you say, claims Ecclesiastes, that the wise man perishes with the fool? Because of this he is grieved, ashamed and hates everything which man pursues in this life; he grieves over a shameless person who guzzles down honey as a remedy. However, the remedy turns into gluttony, and this person swallows the cure along with his own vomit which he spits out along with the honey. Thus [M.692] memory of a disagreeable taste makes this person dislike honey because the cure causes an upset stomach by satiety. He stuffs himself with delectable food and blurts out his dislike for this life as if it were something destructive, loathsome and worthy of hate: "So I hated life because the work which was done under the sun [J.367] was evil to me" [2.17]. Ecclesiastes does not claim that the evil done under the sun was evil to another person except to himself alone. "Anything I have accomplished does not endure except my opinion and free choice [proairesis] with regard to my pursuits." He says that all things are vain and waywardness [proairesis] of spirit [2.26]. Ecclesiastes remarks that none of his accomplishments is an object of his own hatred but only those which will be done after him such as the construction of ships, harbors, magnificent battlements and buildings, gateways, towers and massive statues. As for those who zealously cultivate earth, there is every kind of lovely tree, shrub and vineyard which are as vast as the sea; Ecclesiastes' successor will also enjoy his other labors.

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It is uncertain that Ecclesiastes will have abundant occasions to commit evil deeds, for he does not wish for the sake of his comprehensive knowledge to imperil the perception of such things. "What I have made," he says, "I have done on account of wisdom." "When I let bound like a foal even a small impulse of unseemly passions, I restrained it by the rein of thoughts and my mind's [J.368] authority." "Who knows if the person after us will rule by pleasure and not let it serve him as a slave submitting to the domination of pleasure? Thus I have hated all my own labor which I have exerted under the sun because I will it leave to someone after me. Who knows whether or not he will be wise or foolish or will exercise power and be skilled in all the labor which I have done under the sun?" I believe that Ecclesiastes does not wish our minds to succumb to a life of debauchery; instead, we must submit them to reason and not let such disgrace dominate them. "Who knows," says Ecclesiastes, "whether or not the person after me will rule through passion or wisdom?" Clearly he calls labor "pleasure" because he admits that partaking of it resembles a constant struggle. "And this," he says, "should be counted as among vain pursuits."

- (2:20) There is something further which Ecclesiastes claims we must renounce and wishes to state it clearly. He speaks of an error in right judgment when confronted with two opposite manners of living. One person exercises himself in virtue [M.693] and does not submit [J.369] to lust, whereas another person does not undertake any virtuous endeavor because he is concerned with physical labors. However, when judging between good and evil, Ecclesiastes disregards the person applying himself to wisdom and pronounces it not only vain but an unjust sentence. "And so," Ecclesiastes says, "I turned about and gave my heart up to despair over all the toil of my labors under the sun" [2.20]. What have I renounced? One man labors in wisdom, knowledge and fortitude while another has nothing to do with them. How does Ecclesiastes attribute the honorable part to someone else? He says that to a person who has not exerted himself in labor (that is, not in the good), he will give his own part (instead, he will cast his lot according to the destiny of the good). However, Ecclesiastes claims, "This is vanity and a great wickedness." Why is this not a great wickedness when he knows man's wayward effort in his labor? Here is Ecclesiastes
- (2:22) response: "A man knows in all his labor and in the waywardness of his heart for what he toils under the sun" [2.22]. What is it that he knows?
- (2:23) "That all his days consist of grief, vexation of spirit and a restless heart at night" [2.23]. Indeed, life is wearisome for the soul under trial as though it were greatly afflicted by goads [J.370] which scourge the heart with onslaughts of lust. But an avaricious greed weighs heavily and yields pain, not pleasure, for those who do not have it. For such persons labor is divided into night and day so that when day is consumed by labors, night gives no rest to the eyes. They drive out sleep thinking how to acquire possessions. Who would not condemn their efforts upon

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close consideration? And so Ecclesiastes calls this "vanity" as mentioned earlier [2.23].

(2:24,25) Once again Ecclesiastes raises an objection. If you call anything external to us vain, oh teacher, perhaps you should not condemn it as vanity. Yet we need food and drink, things not to be rejected but are God's gifts. Here is Ecclesiastes' objection: "There is nothing better for a man than to eat and drink and find enjoyment in his toil. This also I saw is from the hand of God; for apart from him, who can eat and drink" [2.24-25]? [J.371] But the advice of a gluttonous person responds to the teacher, and what does the teacher of wisdom say to the good man? The addition of wisdom here makes a distinction [M.696] to clearly point out goodness. It refers to man and not to cattle, that is, a person addicted to his stomach and who prefers the throat over reason, whereas the good man lives according to the image of the good alone.

(2:26) God does not prescribe food for which our animal nature yearns; rather, he has given wisdom and knowledge in its place [2.26]. How can anyone augment the good through corporeal food? "Man does not live by bread alone" [Mt 4.4] says the Word [Logos] with regard to a true word [logos]; bread does not nourish virtue nor does eating meat strengthen and fortify the soul. The heavenly life is nourished and fortified by other means: temperance is nourishment of the good where wisdom is bread, righteousness is meat, freedom from passion is drink, not the pleasure of the body which creates desire but whose name and fruit is gladness [euphrosune]. Therefore, Ecclesiastes bestows this lovely name upon the soul since it is derived from eu and phronein. We must learn what [J.372] the Apostle [Paul] says, namely, that the kingdom of God does not consist in food and drink but in righteousness, freedom from passion, and blessedness [Rom 14.17].

Because people earnestly strive after corporeal pleasure which is a pursuit and distraction of the soul from things above to what is below, they squander their allotted time in this life by gathering material possessions. Thus whoever judges this good to be from God knows how to define it as vanity. "These things I have said in my own words," says Ecclesiastes. Here is the meaning which the divine words attribute to his understanding: "To the sinner he has given the work of gathering and heaping, only to give to him who is good before God. This also is vanity and a striving after wind" [2.26]. This comparison between good and evil enables us to flee despicable things and direct our lives to what is better in Christ Jesus our Lord, to whom be glory forever and ever. Amen.

The Sixth Homily

(3:1) Everything has a time [chronos] and season [kairos] [J.373] under the sun [3.1], words which form a type of prologue for what we are now considering. Even though our examination involves much effort, the gain is certainly well worth it. Perhaps the end of what we pondered in the first book may also be evident in this section which continues its theme. The preceding chapters condemn man's fruitless pursuit of vanity, and we are now shown the good which we must examine. However, the nourishment of wisdom is opposed to the pursuit of corporal pleasure, and it results in knowing [M.697] how to live according to virtue which is why the prologue has made a promise by saying that there is a place and time for everything under the sun. If you look at the profound sense of the text, you will find a comprehensive philosophy which is both contemplative and practical in nature. And so we will now begin the task of considering the text's meaning of the text. Beings are either material [J.374] and endowed with sensation or they are intelligent and incorporeal. Immaterial beings transcend sense perception, and we have knowledge of them when we strip ourselves of the senses; however, our senses apprehend matter which cannot transcend the heavenly [spiritual] body and go any further than appearances. For this reason Ecclesiastes addresses us with regard to both earthly and heavenly realities that we may live free from error. Material life means bodily existence but contemplation of the good is hidden from persons who live according to their senses. Thus we need experience concerning judgment of the beautiful in the same way we use a rod for measuring a building in order to make sure it is constructed well. With this in mind, Ecclesiastes first shows us how to conduct our lives.

Ecclesiastes claims that there are two ways for judging the good in this life, moderation and opportunity. He now instructs us in these two ways by saying that everything has a time and a season [3.1]. We regard time as measurement coextensive with creation. Such are the two criteria for the good. If these criteria on the whole are judged [J.375] as expedient for procuring each virtue, I am not at all confident until the preceding text shows the reason. However, we can easily recognize a person who governs most of his life by these criteria. Who does not know that virtue is the measure dealt out to what we have been considering? There would be no virtue or lack of the proper measure or excess as in fortitude whose deficiency is fear and whose excess is audacity. Therefore worldly wisdom with which we are perhaps familiar clarifies the meaning of this text and does not lack terse sayings cautioning about excess. Ecclesiastes now speaks about the best measure and makes a pronouncement about a lack of excess showing that both do not determine the measure of virtue, and that we must reject anything pertaining to measure. Nevertheless, he offers us the measure of opportunity because we can neither judge as good the opportunity we

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have already received nor the one to follow. What does the farmer gain by cutting corn [M.700] before it is ripe [J.376] or to be unduly anxious over the seed which has not yet appeared in the stalk? Neither situation is advantageous because time is lost by a premature cutting. What pertains to the part may apply the whole, and the same applies to the art of sailing. What about medicine? Excess in harmful activity and deficiency in time and measure also apply to healing, but we must put aside these examples since Ecclesiastes offers us a better one.

What is the reason for the points we have considered? The good has no bounds nor is it untimely; rather, the qualities of beauty and its uniqueness make it perfect. If we focus our attention only on one quality and neglect the other, our other work is of no value even though it is performed well. Similarly, we have two feet for walking; if anything happens to one of our feet it becomes useless and incapable for walking by reason of the weakness present within it. If measure [metron] or opportunity is not present within time, the present is quite useless; however, due proportion [summetria] befits time, and opportunity is useful for measure. In this way we understand time instead of measure since [J.377] we define it as the measure of both due proportion and opportunity. Indeed, whatever belongs to time, extension or the interval concurrent with it is determined by something little in what is small and something large in that which is great. Time is the measure of conception, the growth of corn, fruit, the measure of sailing, walking, the periods of life which are infancy, childhood, adolescence, youth, early manhood, the prime of life, middle age, fullness of maturity, middle age, old age and senility. Time is not restricted by one measure (for each stage of growth is not the same because persons differ from one another), while everything subject to measure has the same, all-encompassing time. For this reason Ecclesiastes does not say that measure belongs to all things because there is equality in that which is both great and small with regard to measure. However, time is a general measure and standard. Just as we advance towards old age in the various stages of growth--the period [of youth] is not yet stable and is undisciplined, while the optimum stage between youth and old age does not partake of their unpleasant aspects since a person has outgrown youth's undiscipline yet does not lack prudence, a characteristic of old age--we must equally avoid [J.378] the senility of old age and the undiscipline of youth in order to unite strength with prudence. In this way Ecclesiastes defines time [3.1], and in each stage of life he removes the evil in both which results from a lack of measure, [M.701] thereby holding in dishonor anything which exceeds its time and dismissing any deficiency.

- (3:2)** It would be opportune to present Ecclesiastes' divinely inspired words for our consideration. "There is a time to be born and a time to die" [3.2]. He does well to mention right away the binding union between birth and

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death; death necessarily follows birth, and each generation passes away. To show the connection between death and birth, the former is like a spur to arouse persons immersed in the flesh who love this present existence that they may pay attention to the future. Moses, the friend of God, quietly philosophizes over these matters as we see in the first titles of his books; he immediately writes Exodus [NB: Exodus means "exit"] right after Genesis [NB: Genesis means "generation"]. Thus these titles teach us about the order of our lives, for there is no birth [genesis] without death [exodos]. The great Ecclesiastes shows that death holds the same rank as birth: "There is a time to be born and a time to die." I have a time to be born, and [J.379] a time will come for me to die. When taking into account all creation, we do not associate with the ungodly once we have left behind the short path of this life; these ungodly persons have freely strayed by circuitously wandering about in power, appearances and wealth. Such deviations make us lose our way, and we can no longer exit the labyrinth of this life which seem to urge us on and confound the signs of our journey. On the other hand, how blessed are those who have forsaken the vain deceptions of this life and pursue the short road of virtue! Nothing can divert them since they struggle for their expectations through faith.

Let us once more examine the text, "There is a time to be born and a time to die." Would that my birth be timely and my death opportune! No one can say that the pangs of birth are voluntary, and Ecclesiastes now spontaneously speaks about death as a means to direct himself by virtue. Neither does pain come by a woman's volition nor does death come voluntarily. That which does not lie in our power does not define virtue or vice, so we must understand the timeliness of birth and death. For me, birth seems timely and does not suffer abortion when, [J.380] as Isaiah says [26.17], a person conceives by the fear of God and begets salvation through the pangs of his soul. Similarly, we become fathers when by choosing the good we form ourselves, come to birth and [M.704] enter the light. We do this in order to manifest God in ourselves after having become sons of God [Jn 1.12], children of virtue [Jud 18.2] and children of the most High [Lk 6.35]. But we cause a miscarriage, suffer immaturity and are carried about by the wind when, as the Apostle says [Gal 4.19], we do not bear Christ's form within us. We must, he says, become a perfect man of God when human nature becomes fully complete.

If anyone makes himself a son of God by virtue, he receives power to beget it. He knows the time for a good birth and rejoices in the Gospel's words which say that there is rejoicing at the birth of a person into the world [Jn 16.21]. But the person who is a son of wrath [Eph 2.3], a son of perdition [Jn 17.12], a child of darkness [1Ths 5.5], an offspring of a viper [Mt 3.7], an evil descendent [Prov 30.11] and anything else causing an evil birth, does not know the time to bestow life because

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there is one time for giving birth, not many. Thus any person testifying to an untimely birth begets his own ruin and has death for a midwife. [J.381] If it is now clear how we are born in time, it should also be clear how we die in time like blessed Paul who was ripe for a good death. He cried out in his own words which resembled an oath that "Each day I die for your glorification" [1Cor 15.31], and "For your sake we are put to death all the daylong" [Rom 8.36]. Again, "We have the sentence of death in ourselves" [2Cor 1.9]. We do not accurately know how Paul dies daily, the same Paul who never allows sin to abide in himself [Rom 6.6]. He always mortifies his bodily members [Col 3.5], bears the death of the body of Christ in himself [2Cor 4.10], is always crucified with Christ and never lives for himself but has Christ living within him [Gal 2.19-20]. In my judgment this opportune death truly procured a holy passing. "I kill and bring to life" [Dt 32.39] in order to truly believe that death to sin and life in the spirit [1Pt 3.18] is a gift of God; indeed, God's voice puts to death and brings to life.

The following words parallel what we just said above: "There is a time to plant and a time to pluck up what has been planted" [3.2]. We know [J.382] our husbandman and that we are the ones whom he cultivates. We have learned what Christ had done and what the servant of Christ, Paul, had done. The Lord says, "My father is the husbandman" [Jn 15.1], and the Apostle says to us that "you are God's cultivation" [1Cor 3.9]. Thus the great husbandman alone knows how to plant good things ("God planted a garden in Eden, to the east," Gen 2.8) and how to uproot anything hostile to them. "Every plant which my heavenly father has not planted will be uprooted" [Mt 26.13]. Thus these uprooted plants, the malicious, unbelieving Pharisees, were hostile [M.705] to our Lord's miracles. The preaching of salvation must be strengthened: "The Gospel must be preached throughout the entire world" [Mt 26.13], and "Every tongue must confess that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father" [Phil 2.11]. Although these facts are true, the unbelief of some persons which does not belong to the Father's plant is strengthened; rather, such unbelief belongs to him [the devil] who sowed darnel or planted the shoot of the Sodomites along with the vine of the Lord. We now symbolically learn through Ecclesiastes the lesson our Lord imparts to us in the Gospel, namely, that it is [J.383] time to accept the salvation of faith and to reject the darnel of unbelief. However, what is said in part is that which is rightly done in faith, and you should apply it to every virtue. There is a time to plant temperance and a time to uproot intemperance. And so, the unjust shoot is uprooted and righteousness is planted; the plant of humility turns away arrogance; charity, which has sprung up, cuts down the evil tree of hatred. Similarly, the increase of injustice makes love grow cold. Let us not delay in speaking of other matters individually so we will not fail to understand them in the same way.

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- (3:3)** Yet again the text which we had just considered concurs with what now follows: "There is a time to kill and a time to heal" [3.3]. The prophet correctly explains this verse and says in God's presence, "I kill and I make to live" [Dt 32.39]. Unless we kill the enemy in ourselves, love, which hatred has made ill, will not cure us. Thus every other evil--I mean the civil war within us resulting from pleasure which leads us captive to the [J.384] law of sin--has a time to be killed, for its death becomes healing for the person sick with sin. Physicians say that bad humors propagate worms and other parasites within our intestines and cause death; if medicine kills them, health is restored. These examples pertaining to the body may apply analogously to the sickness of the soul. Whenever anger exhausts you or injuries cut the soul's tautness and thoughts, or if you feel that your soul is nourishing a beast within, the time is right to apply a cure for their destruction. The Gospel teaches the same thing, namely, that killing brings life.

"There is a time to pull down and a time to build up" [3.3]. Jeremiah the prophet [M.708] teaches us about God through these words. God first bestowed upon him power to purify, root up, destroy and then to rebuild, construct anew and to plant [Jer 1.10]. We must [J.385] first pull down within us the buildings of evil and then find a space to construct a temple for God in our souls whose material is virtue. Anyone building upon this foundation with gold, silver and precious stones [1Cor 3.12], may call such materials virtues. On the other hand, wood, grass and straw are interpreted as evil which are of no profit and provide fuel for the fire. Therefore when buildings are constructed from grass and straw, that is, from unrighteousness, arrogance and the other evils of life, Ecclesiastes first bids us to destroy them and make the gold of virtue material for constructing the spiritual house. Silver cannot be fused with straw, gold with grass nor pearls with wood; rather, in order to build anything, the other building must be torn down. What partnership does light have with darkness [2Cor 6.14]? We must first tear down the works of darkness and then construct buildings of light.

- (3:4)** "There is a time to weep and a time to laugh" [3.4]. Our Lord declares in the Gospel [J.386], "Blessed are those who mourn because they will be comforted" [Mt 5.4]. Now is the time to weep while the time to laugh consists in hope because our present sadness is a mother who begets joy which is stored up for the future. Who does not squander his life in lamentation and sullenness? He returns to his senses and realizes what he had and then lost, that is, his original condition and that which is present. Both you and I were subject neither to death nor sickness because these pernicious elements had been banished from our lives. The sun, air and God's grace belong to everyone and share his common blessing. While God freely offered us a share in every good, he did not acknowledge the sickness of avarice; neither does the person

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with less have reason to hate the one who has more (for such was not the case).

There are other examples too innumerable to list which require lengthy explanation. I mean the honor bestowed upon the angels, our confidence in God's presence, contemplation of transcendent blessings and the incorruptible beauty of [God's] blessed nature which adorns us and is manifested by the soul's beauty in its [J.387] resplendent divine image. Since we have the evil swam of passion and the pernicious wasps of distress, how can we begin to speak about such evils? Each one holds equal honor with respect to the other, has a preeminence with regard to evil and is an occasion for lament. Why, then, does a person grieve over his suffering? What is the source of so much lamentation? Life ends quickly [M.709]; its labor begins and ends with tears, has a miserable childhood, the senility of old age, the inconstancy of youth, the travail of constant labors during the prime of one's life, the burdens of matrimony, the loneliness of an unwed person, the annoyance of many children, the rootlessness experienced by having no children, the burden of wealth and the sufferings of poverty.

I remain silent about various illnesses, afflictions, mutilations, decay, the incapacitation of our senses, demonic afflictions, everything in human nature and the passions which each person has. I must also include the insanity of love and foul smelling filth into which it is transformed; I omit the unpleasant aspect of food's rejection [through our intestines] so as not to attribute them to life, thereby demonstrating that our nature constitutes [J.388] in such filth. I omit all these things and make special mention of what deserves our tears with respect to persons who feel they know everything. Once this shadowy existence of ours has passed, the fearful expectation of judgment and the consuming fire which devours adversaries awaits us. Who does not live in constant affliction when considering these matters? We should now subject such things to examination. These dreadful expectations can no longer afflict our present existence since [God] promises joy for a good person which is kept in store through hope; as the Apostle says [Rom 5.5], such hope cannot be put to shame.

The words which now follow resume what we had considered earlier, for Ecclesiastes adds to the time for tears and laughter: "A time to mourn and a time to dance" [3.4]. This no more than an elaboration of what he had already said. Scripture refers the term "mourning" [Mt 11.17] to any person subject to passion and who is grieved inwardly. Similarly, dancing signifies intense joy as we learn from the Gospel: "We piped to you, and you did not dance" [Lk 7.32]. History says that [J.389] the Israelites mourned Moses' death [Dt.34.8] while David preceded the ark in dance when the Philistines returned it from captivity [1Sam 6.1-16]. David expressed himself in harmonious songs by striking his harp while

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his feet and body moved to the rhythm which revealed his disposition. Since man's nature is two-fold, body and soul, mourning is beneficial for our corporeal existence (there are many occasions for affliction in this existence) because it enables us to prepare our souls for this harmonious dancing [of David]. Although we abhor dejection, [M.712] the occasions for gladness are certainly more numerous. Continence is confining, humility is sad, suffering is burdensome and sorrow cannot equal these. However, "He who humbles himself shall be exalted" [Lk 14.11], and he who afflicts himself by poverty will be crowned. The person who subjects himself to violence and proves himself worthy through affliction in everything will rest in the patriarch's [Abraham] bosom [Lk 16.20]. This is our rightful place through the mercy of him who saved us, Jesus Christ, to whom be glory forever. Amen.

The Seventh Homily

- (3:5) [J.390] "There is a time to cast stones and a time to gather stones" [3.5]. The leader of the Church's ranks confirmed the strength of his hearers by his teaching that they may now cast stones at their adversaries and procure such stones. We first learned to adapt everything by a measured time and were instructed to provide an appropriate occasion to judge the good which enables us to extend the arm of our soul and to cast stones at our enemies as well as to gather them up that we may always have enough stones to shoot at our adversary. Persons who look only at the letter and the superficial sense also accommodate Ecclesiastes' words to the Law of Moses which bids us [J.391] to cast stones at law breakers [Num 15.32-36]. History has taught us about persons who break the Sabbath and who have stolen sacred objects in addition to other transgressions which the Law has commanded to be punished by stoning. If Ecclesiastes does not provide an opportunity to gather stones of which neither the Law nor any historical record speaks, I would concur with those who interpret the Law as an occasion to cast stones at any violator of the Sabbath or at anyone who removed sacred objects. Another occasion to gather stones which is not legislated offers us another interpretation, that is, it teaches us about this stone after it is cast; the person who threw the stone can possess it again.

After we have cast stones at the appropriate time, we learn to gather them again. It is not sufficient for me to accept the Law at its face value, for what can a mere understanding of the text say of [J.392] God's greatness? If anyone who has gathered sticks for fuel is caught on the Sabbath, must he be killed since this error is not unjust? What transgression is there in gathering dry grass necessary [M.713] to feed a fire? An alien is not condemned to death to make this injustice acceptable; rather, the occasion to cast stones is obvious to everyone. But because this person violates the Sabbath, he is condemned. Who does not know that each action is judged according to its own merits whether evil or not? The time of the action is considered apart from the nature of the person who committed the deed. What shares a common interval of time with an action we freely committed? If asked of what the day consists our response is that the sun above the earth measures morning and evening. Our answer not only pertains to the circuit of the seventh day but to the first and second day right up to the seventh, and that the Sabbath day does not differ from the others according to our notion of a day.

[J.393] Our response with regard to sin is that we should not harm our neighbor. Scripture says "You shall not commit adultery. You shall not kill" and so forth [Ex 20.13-14]. Here the Law is general and the final word on such these matters. It further says that we should love our neighbor as ourselves [Lev 19.18; Mt 22.39], precepts which are carried

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out each day as well as violated. No one who judges something as evil today, whether murder or anything else forbidden, should regard it as good the following day. Since an evil of this kind always transpires in time, indeed no harmful action would be becoming with respect to time. Wood gathered and fire kindled before the Sabbath are not subject to condemnation and punishment. How, then, can this act be held as an offense for the following day? I am familiar with the Sabbath rest and the ineffectiveness of the Law which orders man to cease from work and does not hinder his natural functions. If the Law orders us to do something impossible such as requesting us to remain inactive, does this differ from any of life's other functions? Who does not know that the eyes' function is to see, the ears to [J.394] hear, the nose to smell, the mouth to inhale, the tongue to speak, the teeth to chew food, the bowels to digest food, the feet to walk and the hands to be active? How can the Law endorse inaction if our human nature is not lazy? How can I persuade my eye not to see on the Sabbath when its very nature is to see? How can I stop my faculty of hearing? How can I persuade my sense of smell to ignore odors in accordance with the Sabbath? How can my intestines not perform their function by allowing undigested food to remain in the body that they be inactive according to the Law?

If the rest of our bodily members cannot observe the inaction prescribed by the Law (for their inactivity is a sign of no life), it is impossible to observe the Sabbath [M.716] even though our hands remained inactive or food stayed in our stomachs. Since the Law is for man as a whole and not for just one member of his body, we will observe the Law by not keeping one member at rest or violate its command by performing other natural functions. However, the Law is divine; nothing which God [J.395] ordains is unnatural nor improper, but any unreasonable inactivity lacks virtue. Therefore, it behooves us to examine what the Sabbath means by its command of inactivity. I maintain that the entire divine Law has one aim, freedom from evil deeds, because it bids us to observe the Sabbath by refraining from wickedness. It contains the tablets [Ex 34.18] and the Levitical observation accurately recorded in Deuteronomy [Num 1.47] which request us to remain inactive with regard to evil. If we accept the Law which makes us refrain from evil, I agree with the wise Ecclesiastes who counsels against gathering wood and the casting of stones because he prohibits us to gather the wood of evil which feeds fire. But if a person observes the Law's letter, I do not see how it contains any action befitting God.

We must now examine the stones which are cast so that our eagerness for collecting wood might not be impeded. What are the trees serving as fuel [J.396] for the person who gathers them? Clearly they have a mystical significance. If the Apostle [Paul] calls wood, corn and grass material to construct an evil house [1Cor 3.12]--such dwellings at the time of judgment are cast into the fire and the useless wood is fit only

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for the fire--then the wood gathered for fire clearly represents this life's vain pursuits, and we need to cast stones against this dwelling at the appropriate time. We would be correct in understanding wood as any thought inclined to evil, so we must perceive these stones which Ecclesiastes rightly casts at the destructive thoughts of evil. We should always cast them and then gather them. An enemy comes to lay waste our noble life; however, the bosom of our souls must always be prepared to cast [stones] against the foe if we perceive that he is ready to assault us in another manner. Where do we gather stones to hurl against our foe? I have heard the prophet saying "for holy stones are rolled upon the land" [Zach 9.16, Septuagint]. We must gather into our soul's bosom these divinely inspired words which come down [J.397] for use against our foes. Our casting of stones [M.717] destroys the enemy, a deed closely associated [with the stone itself] because whoever casts the stone of temperance at an unchaste thought which feeds the fire through pleasure is victor and always bears a weapon in his hand. Once righteousness becomes a stone against injustice, it destroys this evil and is kept in our bosom. In this way everything we understand about the good which destroys evil is associated with a person who conducts himself virtuously. Thus our interpretation [of Ecclesiastes' words] requires a time to cast stones and a time to gather them that we may always cast goodness to destroy evil and never lack such weapons.

The words which now follow deal with opportune and inopportune times. The text reads "There is a time to embrace and a time to refrain from embracing" [3.5], words which will become clear only if we first look at them in the context of scripture [J.398] and enable us to clearly know how the divinely inspired text is used for obtaining insight. The great David cries out in the Psalter "Walk around Zion, go round about her" [Ps 47.13]. Solomon himself made a spiritual connection by yoking our capacity for love to wisdom and utters other words to unite us to virtue, "Honor her in order that she will embrace you" [Prov 4.8]. If David bids us to walk around Zion and if Solomon says that wisdom will embrace those who honor her, we will not be mistaken about the meaning [of the text] before us which instructs us about an opportune time. Mount Zion is Jerusalem predominantly situated upon a mountaintop; therefore he who urges you to embrace her bids you to be united to that lofty manner of life in order to attain the peak of virtues as symbolized by Zion. He who wishes wisdom to dwell with you [J.399] announces her embrace. And so, it is time to walk around Zion [perilambanein] and be embraced [perilambanesthai] by wisdom for the word "Zion" represents an exalted manner of life. However, wisdom in itself signifies every virtue. If we had known the opportune time for embracing as expressed by [Ecclesiastes], separation is perceived as superior to union. Ecclesiastes says "There is a time to embrace and a time to refrain from embracing." Anyone joined to virtue is hostile to evil. "What partnership does light have with darkness or what does Christ have to do with Belial" [2Cor 6.14-15]? How can a person serve two opposite masters

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and be well-disposed to both [Mt 6.24]? He either loves one or hates the other.

When we lovingly cling to the beautiful (that is, what is opportune) we alienate ourselves from any previous hostility [M.720]. If you truly loved temperance, you hate its opposite. If you lovingly contemplate purity, you despise the foul stench of filth. If you cling to the good, you would indeed distant yourself from clinging to evil. If anyone associates the meaning of this embrace with one of wealth, Ecclesiastes points out the richness of this good which we embrace [J.400] along with the embrace of those possessions we should rid ourselves. I realize that the treasure hidden in the field for which we long [Mt 13.44] is not apparent to everyone. The Apostle says "We do not look to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen; for the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal" [2Cor 4.18]. If we have understood these words, we will see their meaning by what now follows.

- (3:6)** "There is a time to seek and a time to lose" [3.6]. The text we have just examined teaches us how to distant oneself from embracing and how to unite oneself. We are able to comprehend both what is worthy of seeking and the benefit obtained from destruction. "There is a time to seek and a time to lose." What does Ecclesiastes oblige me to seek in order to realize an opportune time? But let us see what prophecy says: "Seek the Lord and be strengthened" [Ps 104.4]. And again, "Seek the Lord and when you find him, call upon him" [Is 55.6]; "let the heart that seeks the Lord rejoice" [Ps 104.3]. These verses teach me of the necessity to seek and that my discovery consists in a constant search for [J.401] seeking is not one thing and finding another, but the gain obtained from our seeking is to seek yet further. Do you wish to learn the opportune time for seeking the Lord? Let me briefly state that your entire life is the only time to carry this out. Seeking the Lord is not defined by limit or time; rather, the truly opportune time for this consists in never putting an end to our search. "My eyes are always upon the Lord" [Ps 24.15]. Do you see how diligently the eye searches for its object? It never rests nor ceases from comprehending what it seeks. The word "always" [dia pantos] shows our need for continuity and unceasing zeal. In the same way let us understand the time for losing as gain because any form of gain is subject to penalty. Avarice is a wicked possession we should lose; we should reject remembrance of past injuries which we have stored up. Another harmful possession is unbridled lust which we must take special care to banish in order to possess the kingdom of poverty. "Blessed are the poor in spirit" [Mt 5.3], that is, those persons who lack wealth [M.721] and the devil's other treasures. But it is even more blessed not to possess the first impulse of evil in order to [J.402] be free from harmful possessions. Similarly, a person in evil's grasp must both free himself from these possessions

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and utterly destroy them although not to share these evils is better, despite the fact that our human nature has the capacity of abolishing them.

Only the Lord is free from the adversary's possessions; he conformed himself to us and our passions yet had no sin [Heb 4.15]. "The prince of this world is coming and he has no power over me" [Jn 14.30]. Anyone who takes care to cleanse himself by repentance can observe persons who allow virtue to shine through. Paul despised the evil of unbelief by accepting the gift of prophecy [Gal 2.8-9] since it had the treasure he sought. Isaiah lost all impurity of word and thought through purification by the divine coal [Is 6.6-7] and was filled by the Holy Spirit. He lost every bit by participating in the good or anything he reckoned contrary to it. And so, the temperate man loses licentiousness, the righteous loses unrighteousness, the modest person loses arrogance, the benevolent loses jealousy and the loving person loses hostility. Similarly, the blind man in the Gospel found what he did not have and lost what he already had [Mk 8.22-26], that is, the splendor of light [J.403] took the place of his blindness. Also the leper received the boon of health [Mt 8.1-4], and life was bestowed upon those who rose from the dead while death passed away [Mk 1.40-45]. Therefore our teaching claims that we cannot possess anything on high unless we lose our earthly, humble qualities. Once we discover [heavenly treasures] our earlier preferences pass away, for their destruction will procure for us more honorable things. Our Lord teaches this by saying "He who finds his soul will lose it, and he who loses his life for my sake will find it" [Mt 10.39]. The soul will not find anything in its zealous pursuit of material gain, however, privation and loss constitute our hope: "What profit is there to a man if he gains the entire world and loses his soul" [Mt 16.26]? As Ecclesiastes says, "There is a time to seek and a time to lose" [3.6]. If we know the value of our seeking which is found by the destruction of evil, let us seek one and lose the other. Let us seek the good and lose evil.

The following words rightly follow those we have just examined: "There is a time [J.404] to keep and a time to cast away" [3.6]. What are we to keep? It is clear that any discovery comes from seeking. What are we to cast away? Anything whose destruction we deem beneficial. A good thought arises [M.724] when you desire to see God; your soul thirsts for the strong, living God [Ps 41.3], and you desire to be in the courts of the Lord [Ps 83.3]. In my opinion these courts are the virtues inhabited both by reason and reasonable actions. I have kept watch over them so that the wealth of clean possessions which my mind now has may not flow out to you. Certain impure thoughts enter; like a hidden thief they steal away pure thoughts, so we must reject them. We will safely protect the treasure house of our good possessions by banishing impure thoughts.

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If we fail to reject their destructive power, our possession will be of no value when housebreakers easily enter by their crafty schemes.

We have learned of the time to seek: "Everyone who seeks will find" [Mt 7.8]. Let us diligently guard our treasury that what we have found might abide. "Keep your heart with all vigilance" [Prov 4.23] once you have found the object of your search, for it is better to guard the grace we have already found. One example is a person who discovers faith and purity through purification, [J.405] but it is more difficult to guard what we have found than to find what we did not have. Similarly, the time to seek is not limited to a fixed occasion; instead, one's entire life should be an opportunity for seeking that good. And so we must carefully measure out the time to guard our entire life as that prophetic voice now says, "My eyes are always towards the Lord because he will rescue my feet from the net" [Ps 24.15]. These words will enable us to safely protect our good possession since God is their guard. Whenever my eyes are always towards the Lord, the enemy's snares endeavoring to assault my soul's precious possessions will be rendered ineffectual. "He will not let your foot be moved, he who keeps you will not slumber" [Ps 120.3]. This verse provides the present context for the words which just preceded. Ecclesiastes bids us to seek in order to find while also counseling us to guard against losing our possessions. We understand this guarding of the good as our rejection of anything contrary. Similarly, a besieged city is kept safe by casting out traitors, but when hidden enemies are within the city, they hatch secret plots instead of open ones. "There is a time to keep and a time to cast away."

[J.406] The words which now follow conduct the soul to a loftier philosophy about creation. It shows that the universe contains everything, and its harmony does not admit the dissolution of created beings; instead, we have concord between them all. Neither is the universe severed from any of its parts, but all things remain in their essence by the power of him who truly exists. Indeed the Being [God] is true existence or absolute goodness [M.725], and any name we ascribe to him points to his unutterable reality. How can we ever find that name "which is above every other name" as the divine Apostle says [Phil 2.9]? But any name meant to explain the ineffable power and nature [of God] signifies that which is good. Therefore this good [God] or that which transcends any good has true existence through which it bestows existence and continues to give power and permanence to creation, whereas anything outside it lacks existence; whatever lies outside the realm of existence does not remain in being. Since evil [J.407] is directly opposed to virtue and God is absolute virtue, evil is alien to God's nature whose nature does not exist in him but which cannot be comprehended by the good; we apply the name of evil to that which outside the good. Evil is opposed to the good as non-being is distinguished from being. We avoid the good by our free will just like

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persons see darkness who are not in the light. Then evil's insubstantial nature lays hold of those who deviate from the good and continues to have existence as long as they remain outside the good. If our free will once again dissociates itself from insubstantiality and is united to being, it no longer exists in me nor will really exist because evil cannot exist apart from free will. However, when I adhere and cling to what truly exists, I remain in the Being which always was, will be and now is. **(3:7)** Ecclesiastes words, "There is a time to rend and a time to sew" [3.7], convey this meaning. If we [J.408] dissociate ourselves from our previous adhesion to evil, we must cling to God whose good in this adherence. "For me it is good to cling to God, and to place my hope in the Lord" [Ps 72.28].

I have said that there are many other useful counsels such as "Remove evil from yourselves" [1Cor 5.13]. The divine Apostle imposes these words upon a condemned person, one outside the Law and one who is separated from the Church because a small amount of the leaven of evil which a condemned person commits can render the entire lump of the Church's prayer useless [cf. 1Cor 5.6]. However, the person rejected by sin can again join the Church through repentance "in order that he might not be overwhelmed by excessive sorrow" [2Cor 2.7]. Thus Paul knows the opportune time for cutting off the soiled part of the Church's garment and for sewing it back on again, that is, when we wash it from defilement through repentance. As in our own lives, we observe many such examples in ancient narratives which are fulfilled in the churches out of solicitude. Realize from what we are cut off and are always sewn on. Having been severed from heresy, we are sewn on to the true religion, for [J.409] the robe of the Church, as we observe, is still whole, even when it has broken off any fellowship with heretics. [M.728] But whether the text teaches through our earlier considerations or through the present counsel, it contains useful words for rending and sewing at the opportune time.

Let us continue further because for me a reading of the text is appropriate due to its loftier philosophy. In the first place Ecclesiastes offers us a time to keep silent and then a time to speak. When and about which things is it better to maintain silence? We are usually silent when we hear an edifying word as from Paul who discerned a time for silence and speech; he legislated one time for silence and another for speaking: "Let no evil talk come out of your mouths" [Eph 4.29] Such is the law of silence. But if any good for building up faith is required to bestow grace upon one's listeners, it is an opportune time to speak. "Women should observe silence in the churches" [1Cor 14.34]. Here is another time for silence: "If there is anything [J.410] they desire to know, let them ask their husbands at home" [1Cor 14.35]. In these words Paul gives a further opportunity for speaking. "Do not lie to one another" [Col 3.9] is an opportunity for silence. "Let everyone speak the truth with his

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neighbor" [Eph 4.24] shows the power of the spoken word. The Old Testament offers many similar examples. "When the wicked man stood before me, I was dumb, humbled, and kept silent from speaking good things" [Ps 38.1-2]. And, "I was as a deaf man who does not hear and as a dumb man unable to speak" [Ps 37.13]. Yet when the wicked man is present a person remains silent and unmoved before the charge of evil; when it is time to speak, he opens his mouth in parables [Ps 77.2], utters words, fills his mouth with praise [Ps 70.8] and makes his tongue a pen [Ps 44.1].

What necessity is there for minutely examining the innumerable references of scripture since they mean the same? But I first wish to sum up in a few words the prudence for an opportune time with regard to silence and speech by using the example of a break and sewing. There the text presents for our comprehension of that which has true being by clinging to it the soul which adheres in an corrupt fashion to what is opposite, [J.411] an observation we had made earlier. To me, first place seems given to silence, that is, to God who transcends every thought and name [Phil 2.9]. Once the soul breaks from evil, it always seeks and desires to be sewn onto the object of its search, God, who is [M.729] loftier than any of our words. Anyone detracting from the significance of the text sins against God whom we believe utterly transcends our capacity for speech. However, the person attempting to comprehend God who cannot be circumscribed by limitations, does not admit that God transcends the universe. He sets his own reason up in opposition, considering it to be such and such a thing which can contain any type of thought. He does not know that God in whom we believe transcends our knowledge and that every consideration befitting him serves to guard his true existence. Why is this so? Because every created being looks to what is connatural, and no being can remain in existence apart from itself. Fire cannot exist in water; neither can water be present in fire, dry land in the depth, water in dry land, earth in the sky nor the sky in the earth. Everything is limited by its own nature as long as it exists and stays within its own bounds. If anything created goes outside itself, it will lose its own essence [J.412] just like the senses which cannot transgress their natural functions. The eye does not function like the ear nor does our sense of touch speak; hearing does not taste, but each sense is limited by the power natural to it. Thus all creation cannot transgress its natural limitations by a comprehensive insight; it always remains within its own bounds and whatever it may view, it sees itself. Should creation think it beholds anything which transcends it, this cannot be because it lacks the capacity to look beyond its own nature.

The contemplation of beings is restricted by a certain notion of temporal interval which cannot be transgressed. Indeed, for every conception which the mind gives birth an interval of time is considered along with

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the substance of that which had thought it; an interval of time is nothing other than creation. The good which we strongly encourage to seek, guard, to unite ourselves and cling to transcends creation and thought. Our mind functions by using intervals within time, so how can it grasp [God's] nature which is not subject to temporal extension? Through the medium of time the inquisitive [mind] always leaves behind any [J.413] thought older than what it just discovered. The mind also busily searches through all kinds of knowledge yet never discovers the means to grasp eternity in order to transcend both itself and what we earlier considered, namely, the eternal existence of beings. This effort resembles a person standing on a precipice (Let a smooth, precipitous rock which abruptly falls off to a limitless distance suggest this transcendence whose prominence reaches on high while also falls to the gaping deep below). A person's foot can touch that ridge falling off to the depths below and find neither step nor support for his hand. To me, this example pertains to the soul's passage through [J.414] intervals of time in its search for [God's] nature which exists before eternity and is not subject to time. His nature cannot be grasped because it lacks space, time, measure and anything else we can apprehend; instead, our mind is overcome with dizziness and stumbles all over the place because it cannot lay hold of transcendent reality [M.732]. Being powerless, it returns to its connatural state. Our minds love to know only about God's transcendence of which they are persuaded because his nature differs from anything we know.

When reason confronts that which transcends reason, it is time to be silent and marvel at his unutterable power which cannot be explained since it is hidden in one's consciousness. It knows that the great prophets speak of God's works, not of God himself. "Who can tell of the Lord's power" [Ps 105.2]?; "I will tell of all your works" [Ps 9.2] and "Generation after generation will praise your deeds" [Ps 144.4]. These words explain what our human voice can utter, but silence becomes the norm with regard to him who utterly transcends any conception. [J.415] We therefore say that "the glorious majesty of his holiness" [Ps 144.5] has no end. Oh, how marvelous! What reverence the text shows when contemplating the divine nature when it cannot comprehend such a transcendent wonder! The text did not say that the divine essence is boundless and claimed to be so audacious as to comprehend it; rather, it marvels at God's glorious majesty. Once again the text is unable to see the glory of God's essence but is struck dumb before the glory of his holiness. Therefore God's nature is far removed from our curious inquiries, and even the loftiest of manifestations cannot admire it. The text does not admire his sanctity nor the glory of his holiness but stresses only the glorious majesty of his holiness. We cannot grasp the object of admiration, and so the psalm says that "the glorious majesty of his holiness" has no end.

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When it comes to words about God and searching his essence there is a time for silence, but when it concerns some good operation of which we have knowledge, it is time to speak of God's power, miracles and works which necessitate words. A creature should not overstep its bounds with regard to transcendent matters but remain content with knowledge of [J.416] himself. If, in my opinion, he does not know himself, he as a creature cannot comprehend the soul's essence, the body's nature, the origin of created beings, how generations spring into existence from one another, how beings come into existence from nothing, how they dissolve into nothing and the harmony created from opposing tensions which constitute this world. If a created person does not know himself, how can he speak of transcendent matters? Thus there is a time to keep silence about such matters, and this silence is better. There is also a time to speak of those things which make our lives grow in virtue in Christ Jesus our Lord, to whom be glory and power forever. Amen.

The Eighth Homily

- (3:8)** [M.733] "There is a time to love and a time to hate" [3.8]. Who can accept these words about love with pure ears and attribute nothing sordid when referring them to oneself? Perhaps our ears need [J.417] the divine touch of Jesus; his true word will cleanse our souls' capacity for hearing from all filth which stands in the way. Then we might clearly understand love which is worthy of all praise as well as the appropriate time to love and to hate. In my opinion both have their respective utility and proper time; if they were no longer required, there would simply be no occasion for them.

I first think we need to understand the significance of love and hate in order to grasp the appropriate time for each of them. Love [philtron] is intrinsic to the concupiscible part of the soul and is aroused by pleasure and passion; hatred is alienation from anything unpleasant, a turning away from stressful situations. We can use both these dispositions either to our advantage or detriment because each person's life functions according to the principle of virtue or vice. Whenever love moves us, we unite our souls to it and alienate ourselves from what we hate. Whether the soul inclines to good or evil, the soul is fused to the object of its love. Whatever this object happens to be, [J.418] and should hatred be present in the soul, it causes withdrawal either from good or evil. Therefore we should consider what is lovable and worthy of hate that we may use this affection of the soul at the right time, alienate ourselves from evil through hate and be strengthened by the good. Would that human nature be instructed in this before all else--I mean the good--and not be separated from it! Our lives would not admit passion if right from the beginning we knew the beautiful. But since we have allowed our irrational senses to first act as criteria for the beautiful, in similar fashion we are nourished from the beginning with regard to judgment of beings. For this reason we have difficulty discerning the good through our senses because they strengthen the way of life with which we are accustomed.

Beauty which appears to men whether by the eyes or pleasure to the eyes through color is in either inanimate [M.736] or animate objects. Our ears enjoy melodious sounds, taste is for juices and scent for aromas; weight and that which is not rational belong to touch, the realm of feeling where undisciplined pleasure dominates. Because senses immediately come to birth within us and [J.419] provide nourishment right from the beginning of existence, our irrational life has much in common with the senses and assumes characteristics we observe in beasts. However, when infantile behavior hinders the mind from acting properly, a more irrational aspect of sense perception afflicts it. For this reason the false, aberrant use of our faculty of love becomes the principle and foundation of an evil life. Since our human nature is two-

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fold, spiritual and sensual, our life is consequently two-fold: the corporal aspect belongs to sense perception while the spiritual belongs to our incorporeal life. Similarly, beauty and its opposite cannot hold sway together in our lives; the spiritual belongs to the spirit, and sense perception belongs to our sensory and corporal nature.

Since sense perception comes into being at our first birth, our minds await a return to mature age so that it might appear, however so little, in a person. And so the senses gradually dominate our minds and always have a strong affinity with any thought our minds put forth; we accordingly judge as good or bad whatever sense perception accepts or rejects. Therefore it is difficult for us [J.420] to comprehend the true good because we are preoccupied with sense criteria which constrict the beautiful by enjoyment and pleasure. Just as we cannot see the beauty in heaven when the sky is darkened, so the soul's eye cannot see virtue obscured by pleasure's mist. Because our senses are attracted to pleasure, our minds are impeded from attending to virtue. Thus pleasure becomes the principle [arche] of evil because our minds assent to an irrational judgment of the good when influenced by the senses. If the eye claims that beauty consists in the lovely color of appearances, it draws the mind in that way. It is the same for the other sense perceptions; anything delighting the senses is considered good. If it were possible to discern for the mind what is good right from the beginning, we would not be subject to our irrational senses and be transformed into beasts reduced to slavery. Thus confusion results with regard to anything worthy of love in our nature along with that which we perceive as wrong. Ecclesiastes says "There is a time to love and a time to hate." Such words discern the nature of things and show what [J.421] we must love [M.737] and hate.

Youth is the age which seethes with passion, the time when we are enamored with its attractions. Ecclesiastes cries out against this time of youth and presents us with another time for having a pure love pure which neither harms nor degrades the soul. Just as thirst resulting from a serpent's bite afflicts a healthy body [dipsas, a serpent whose bite is supposed to cause violent thirst]--for no one would say that this person is naturally thirsty--so youth's misdirected love is not love but a sickness which produces a burning, poisonous sting. Not all love [philia] is opportune, but only that love [agapeton] which is worthy of our attention. However, knowledge of these matters remains unclear unless we attain a solution by careful reflection. Some goods which men pursue are true and are so named while others are fraudulent. Some do not pertain to fleeting pleasure nor are they useless when pertaining to beauty but at all times, through all things and in all things an [opportune love] is beneficial [J.422]. It is truly good, always the same and never associated with evil. Such are the characteristics which upon close scrutiny, pertain exclusively to the divine, eternal nature. All the other

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type of beauty perceived by the senses come from our erroneous opinions; lovely appearances lack substance because they are in a state of flux and transition by a deceptive attitude and a foolish understanding held by uneducated persons who regard such beautiful things as real. Therefore anyone who embraces instability does not seek that which endures forever. Ecclesiastes, as though on a lofty vantage point, cries out to human nature "There is a time to love and a time to hate." He does this because there are other good things which are beautiful and worthy of our participation.

Such is the nature of the good of which we partake which by necessity transforms anyone who shares it. A sweet fragrance becomes part of a person's mouth while nothing else can be worse than the bad odor of garlic. Since every filth of sin is foul-smelling, the virtue of Christ on the other hand is a pleasant odor [2Cor 2.15], for a loving disposition unites a person with the object of his love. We become [J.423] what we love, either a good or foul odor of Christ. The person who loves beauty will become beautiful once he has been transformed by the good [M.740] he received. The ever-existing [God] desires to give himself to us as food in order to transform us into what he is. "My flesh is food indeed, and my blood is drink indeed" [Jn 6.55]. Thus the person who loves this flesh is not sensual, and he who is well disposed to this blood will be cleansed from physical blood. The Word's flesh and the blood of the person in this flesh do not constitute one grace only; rather, it is sweet for whomever tastes it, yearned for by whomever desires it and lusted after [erasmion] by whoever loves it [agaposin].

If a person is attracted by a love for something non-existent, it is inevitable that he associates himself with it. Since truth and falsehood are present in whatever exists, we must familiarize ourselves with vanity in order to understand it when compared with that which truly exists. And so, all holy persons cry out from afar to whomever deviates from the right path and travels on the wrong road, "Get off that road on which you are travelling" [J.424] on which are robbers, thieves and murderers lying in wait. This cry warns the traveler to avoid a perilous route and to keep himself safe, for the great Ecclesiastes [Christ] cries out from above to human nature travelling on that impassible road. As the prophet says [Ps 106.40], "Why do you wander throughout your entire life, oh men? Why do you love vain, insubstantial things, and cling to what lacks substance? There is another steady, safe road. Love it, walk on it through love, for its name is truth, life, light, incorruptibility and so forth. The road on which you are now walking is deserving of hatred and avoidance. It lacks light, is beset by darkness, leads to a cliff, a pit, wild beasts and a lair of robbers." Therefore he who said "There is a time to love" shows what truly deserves our love, and by ascribing a time to hate he teaches what we must avoid.

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When learning that [God's] nature is lovable, we tenderly embrace it and remain firm in our judgment [J.425] about that which is beautiful and the consuming love [to philtron] directed to persons whom the great David admonished, "Oh sons of men, how long will your hearts be heavy? Will you love vanity and seek falsehood" [Ps 4.3]? We must love one thing alone, that which the law of the Decalogue speaks, "You shall love the Lord your God with your whole heart, soul and mind" [Dt 6.5]. There is one object deserving of our hatred, the inventor of evil, the enemy our lives of whom the Law says, "You shall hate your enemy" [Mt 5.43]. The love of God strengthens the person who loves, whereas a disposition towards evil brings destruction upon anyone who loves it. Thus prophecy says "I will love you, Lord, my strength. The Lord is my firm support, [M.741] my refuge and my deliverer" [Ps 17.2-3]. On the other hand we read "He who loves iniquity hates his own soul. [God] shall rain down snares upon sinners" [Ps 10.5-6]. Therefore the time to love God is one's whole life, and the time to be alienated from evil is also one's entire life. Even a person who distances himself from loving God ever so slightly does not resemble him because [J.426] he is separated from love. The person outside God is necessarily outside the light because God is light [1Jn 1.5]; he is not in the light, incorruptibility and every good thought and deed belonging to God because the person not sharing these attributes partakes of their opposites and enters darkness, corruption, utter ruin and death.

Ecclesiastes briefly distinguishes between a time to love and a time to hate, thereby revealing their opposite natures. "There is a time to love," that is, to apply oneself to the good, and "There is a time to hate" or to consider the nature of evil. Each is the root and beginning of sin which perverts the soul's disposition and turns it away. "No one is able to serve two masters; either he will hate one and love the other" [Mt 6.24]. This distinction which allows evil to hold sway demonstrates the necessity of alienation [from evil] by hatred and to be governed by the good which unites a person [to God] through love. Should anyone cling to hatred, he condemns that which must be loved and changes both the opportunity to love [J.427] and hate to his own ruin. The person who condemns anything will in turn be condemned by it, and he who embraces ruin brings it upon himself. Therefore the distinction between virtue and vice enables us to understand the opportunity which presents. Ecclesiastes explains continence and pleasure, temperance and intemperance, modesty and arrogance, benevolence and maliciousness and anything else of this sort for imparting profitable advice. Thus we have a time to love continence and to hate pleasure that we may refrain from licentious behavior and be devout. Strife, gain, love of glory and so forth do not benefit love but prevent us from maintaining a pleasant disposition.

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We have learned in passing that every movement of the soul to the good originates from our Maker. However, the sinful use of such movements begets inclinations [J.428] towards evil because our free will is beautiful when directed against evil with a view to its destruction. On the other hand, the organ of virtue repels [M.744] unpleasant or hateful things when armed against opposing forces; it becomes a weapon in the hands of sin when arrayed against the good. Hence, every aspect of God's creative grace is beautiful in us and must not be rejected if accepted with gratitude. The ungrateful use of these things causes passion in the creature and prevents unity with God; it allows opposite traits to usurp the place of God with other gods. The belly becomes a god for gluttonous persons [Phil 3.19] who make idols out of this madness, and those who have the eyes of their souls darkened in this present age make vain glory their god. Let me repeat: anyone who submits his reason to slavery has made it a god by his own passion. This person would not suffer misfortune unless he appropriated evil through love; if we have properly understood the opportune time for love and hatred, let us love one and make war against the other.

[J.429] "There is a time for peace and a time for war" [3.8]. Observe the battle line of the conflicting passions, the law of the flesh drawn up against the law of your mind which makes it captive to the law of sin [Rom 7.23]. Observe the various implements of battle and see how vast is the array drawn up against your city. The enemy sends out scouts, dispatches traitors, lays snares by the road, sets ambushes and traps, summons allies, prepares war machines, slingers, archers, a band of soldiers for hand to hand combat, cavalry and the like. You are certainly familiar with the traitor, scout, those setting snares, slingers, spear throwers, archers, soldiers fighting in hand to hand combat, the cavalry and similar foes which shake the wall of our souls. The person who considers these things must arm himself, summon allies, see if there might be foes [J.430] among subjected peoples, watch out for snares by the road, protect himself against weapons from behind shields, ward off soldiers in close combat, dig a trench against horsemen, erect breastworks and protect our walls against assaults so that war machines may not shake them. There is no need to explain each point, that is, how the enemy of each city founded by God tries our strength by scouts and implants traitors in our midst.

Such is the first assault of temptation, the beginning of passion, which these words serve to clarify. Such is the one who spies on our strength and observes our assaults in order to stir up our desire. The enemy examines your strength [M.745] for seeing whether you are strong and ready or weak and lax. If his sight does not make you sink nor slacken your resolution and if you shake him off by remaining free from passion, you immediately frighten the spy by acting like a phalanx of arms bristling with spears, I mean your thoughts prepared [J.431] to confront

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the informant. If this sight weakens sense perception and an image enters the mind through our eyes, then the mind or commander of our inner resources will be subdued since he not only lacked fortitude or was youthful but was lazy and dissolute. As a result, many traitors from the crowd, that is, our thoughts, will be summoned to assist the spy. These traitors are the ones of whom the Lord says, "A man's foes shall be of his own household" [Mt 10.36]. He refers to the utterances of his heart which can defile him [Mt 15.18] as we clearly learn from the Gospel. These words clarify our enemy's devices who sets an ambush to fall unexpectedly upon the travelers of the road of this life. Those who assume the pretext of friendship and goodwill in order to persuasively debase a person and destroy him by lying at the roadside, extol pleasure and are first to lead the way to the theater. They cloak evil with benevolence and imitate friends, [J.432] calling themselves brothers and friends to utter destruction. Of them it is written "Every man will surely supplant, and every friend will walk craftily" [Jer 9.4].

A proper understanding of these traps may be represented by the array of slingers, archers and spearmen. Insolent, hot-tempered, and abusive persons manifest their hostility with arrogance instead of weapons or stones. They provoke us by casting and slinging words; they wound with spears the hearts of persons lacking the protection of armor and can pass right through anyone not on guard. The passion of vanity and haughtiness resembles the pride of horses, an indisputable fact. Horses carry their necks high, inflated as they are with arrogant words, for they stomp with their hooves any person showing moderation. Of them scripture says "Let not [J.433] the foot of the proud come against me" [Ps 35.12]. We may rightly call greed the war machines which crumble the harmony of our walls. Nothing is so strong and powerful in the enemy's arsenal as the war machines of avarice. If people take special care to fortify their souls with the harmonious arrangement of other virtues, war machines still make frequent entrance. We are clearly aware that temperance can bring down avarice, and that faith and an accurate perception of [divine] mysteries as well as self-control, humility and the like can strike down this [M.748] persistent, undefeated evil within. Some persons who are strong, self-controlled and ardent in their faith can check the manner [of evil's entry] and moderate it through habits. Nevertheless, they are unable to resist the sickness [of avarice] by themselves.

If we properly understand the enemy's solid mass, we would see that it is time to make war. No one would be courageous against the enemy's battle array without the Apostle's armor [Eph 6.14]. Indeed, everyone is familiar with that divine armor, an inflexible phalanx against our adversaries' weapons. The Apostle divides the virtues into various kinds and fashions the proper armor from each one. By faith he entwines righteousness and fortifies the breastplate with heavy armor to protect

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[J.434] the soldier. One piece of armor cannot be disjointed from another because the entire suit provides safety. Neither can faith save without works of righteousness nor does justice provide salvation unless yoked to faith. For this reason the armor about the heart is entwined with faith and righteousness for the soldier's protection; we understand the heart as this breastplate. A valiant man arms his head with hope, signifying a sublime hope for the good soldier like a helmet crest held on high. The shield covering the weapon is faith which arrows cannot penetrate; without a doubt, the arrows cast by our enemy are various assaults of the passions. The defensive arms fortifying us against the brave enemy's right hand is the Holy Spirit who strikes fear into the adversary yet saves the person who puts him on. The Gospel's entire teaching secures our feet, leaving no part of the body bare and susceptible to blows.

[J.435] If we have gained knowledge about the enemy against whom we must fight and take up arms, we ought to learn about another part of the text, that is, when to make a treaty of peace. Who is the good commander? He enables me to win favor by peaceful means. Who is the leader of this army? The divinely inspired scriptures clearly depict the battle array of angels belonging to the heavenly army: "There was a multitude of the heavenly host praising God" [Lk 2.13]. Daniel saw a thousand thousands and thousand times ten thousand worshipping him [Dan 7.10]. The prophets testify to this, calling him the Lord of all the armies and Lord of hosts [Ps 23.10]. And to Joshua Nave, the powerful one in battle, he said, "I am the commander of the [M.749] army [of the Lord]" [Jos 5.14]. If we have understood the assistance we receive in battle and the leader of our allies, let us make a truce with him, fly to his powerful aide and become friends in order to secure his assistance. The great Apostle [Paul] teaches us how to gain intimacy with him and how to be united in friendship saying, [J.436] "Having been justified by faith, we have peace with God" [Rom 5.1]. And, "We are ambassadors for Christ as though God besought you by us [saying], 'Be reconciled to God'" [2Cor 5.20]. As long as our shameful deeds made us sons of wrath [Eph 2.3] we were among those who opposed the right hand of the Most High. The Apostle says of him "He is our peace" [Eph 2.14], words which form the end and summation of all temporal reality. We who had once been God's adversaries have learned to accomplish all things in time in order to establish peace with ourselves and with him. If the virtues truly belong to the army of peace with which we must be associated, it would not be outside the sense of the text which refers the name of every virtue to the Lord of virtues.

Why do we linger over this text when it is sufficient to simply lay bare the meaning of its words? Although they excite the soul of one who was first trained in these lofty teachings, the text again leads him to a lofty understanding as follows. What great advantage lies in store for a

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(3:9) person who labors in these things? What does Ecclesiastes mean when he says, "What do [J.437] human endeavors accomplish which are of no value" [cf. Ecc. 3.9]? Man tills the ground, sets sail, undertakes military endeavors, engages in selling, obtains possessions, suffers penalties, makes a profit, involves himself in legal matters and engages in combat. He puts misfortunes behind him and wins a victorious acquittal; he is both miserable and happy, remains at home and wanders off to distant lands. When considering life's various toils, what benefit do we see for a person who consumes himself in these pursuits? He denies himself of life, for darkness veils all his endeavors. Deprived of such things, he goes about without clothing and has only his conscience. Then a voice says to man wandering in this life's pursuits, "What profit have you gained from your many laborious exertions? Where are your illustrious buildings? Where is your buried money, bronze idols and voices singing their praises? Behold, all you have now are fire, stripes, [M.752] unbribed judgment and a true examination of your life's deeds."

(3:10) What greater profit now remains for the person in his labors? Ecclesiastes adds, "I have seen the business that [J.438] God has given to the sons of men with which to be busy" [3.10]. God made all things exceedingly beautiful in its time, and for all eternity he put in men's hearts the fact that they might never discover what God has done from the beginning right to the end. Why does he say such things? "I have known," Ecclesiastes says, "the source of distraction for human nature after I have received these occasions from the divine benevolence. God made all things for man's good; he endowed man with reason to distinguish the good in order that he may recognize the right occasion to use each benefit which enables him to perceive the beautiful." Since reason deviated from the correct judgment of created things by having trespassed from what had been ordained through evil counsel, man exchanged the occasion to perform useful actions for evil ones. This resembles a table which talented craftsmen have carefully laid out to make a meal enjoyable and full of good cheer along with choice cutlery for carving meat and silver soup spoons [J.439]. Then some of the invited guests cut themselves with a sword or a similar weapon; they strike either their own eye or another's, for they did not respect what was placed before them. It is said that a host suffers abuse if a person fails to conform according to the reason for which the guests were invited; instead, he introduces an evil use for passion among those who are unwilling to partake of it. Ecclesiastes claims to know that God's actions are good if we use them at the proper time, but our deviation from right judgment leads us to do evil. What do I mean? What is sweeter than the function of our eyes? Whenever passion affects our vision, anything beneficial offers an occasion for evil or an improper use of passion. Thus our free choice can make all other beings created by God [J.440] either good or evil, and for this reason Ecclesiastes says, "He has made everything beautiful in its time, and he has put eternity in men's hearts" [3.11].

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But because eternity signifies a certain extension of thought which contains all creation, the text points out that every created being is embraced by God. Everything which God made in eternity he put into the human heart for the good that we might contemplate their Creator by reason of their greatness and beauty. Yet persons who benefited from them [M.753] do not necessarily suffer affliction if they use them profitably. Because of this Ecclesiastes says "Man cannot find out what God had done" [3.11]. This statement signifies that the human soul's deception is reinforced so that a person is ignorant of the good creation which God has made with a worthwhile goal in mind in all the things from the beginning of creation until their fulfillment when evil shall be no more. Evil does naturally arise from the good; if the Creator and Author of the universe is good, then the substance of all things are good.

- (3:12)** "I know that there is nothing better for them than to be happy and enjoy themselves as long as they live" [3.12]. These words recapitulate everything we have already said. If the right use of what had been divinely created in time defines the good for human life, it is the one joy born from good works which endures among other beautiful things. Observance of the commandments now imparts joy to our good works through hope; then the enjoyment of good things enlivens those persons worthy to receive their eternal hope. As the Lord says to those who have done good, "Come, blessed, inherit the kingdom prepared for you" [Mt 25.34]. As food and drink sustain the body, so the soul must look to the good, a true gift of God on which we have fixed our eyes. For such is the meaning of "It is God's gift to man that every one should eat and drink and take pleasure in all his toil" [3.13]. Just as human nature obtains physical strength through eating and drinking, so the person who looks to the good (for the true good is he who is good alone) has [J.442] the gift of God in all his labor. This is nothing other than to always have our eyes fixed on the good which is in Christ Jesus our Lord, to whom be glory and power forever and ever. Amen.
- (3:13)**

Footnotes for the Introduction

1. It has been argued that a Greek influence came to bear upon the composition of the book of Ecclesiastes. As Roland F. Murphy has pointed out, the author is in the mainstream of ancient Near Eastern wisdom, especially Mesopotamian literature. Cf. **Jerome Biblical Commentary**, (New Jersey, 1968) p.534.
2. At the very beginning of his **Commentary** Gregory mentions the role played by the book of Proverbs: "For when the sense of the book of Proverbs has first exercised our minds by its obscure words, wise sayings, riddles, and various twists of words as contained in the introduction (1.6), we find an ascent for those persons who have advanced to more perfect lessons with regard to this lofty, divinely inspired book. If a toilsome, arduous meditation on Proverbs prepares us for these lessons, how much more laborious and difficult must it be to now examine such sublime matters proposed for our contemplation! (J.277-78) For more information on the relationship between Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and the Song of Songs, cf. **Platonisme et Theologie Mystique** by Jean Danielou (Paris 1943), p.17-26 and **Gregoire de Nysee et L'Hermeneutique Biblique** by Mariette Canevet (Paris 1983), p.127.
3. The rather lengthy quotes from Proverbs may be found on J.18-22. In the First Homily, Gregory says with reference to the role of Ecclesiastes, "Then Solomon adds the philosophy contained in Ecclesiastes for the person who has been sufficiently introduced by proverbial training to desire virtue. After having reproached in that book men's attitudes towards external appearances, and after having said that everything unstable is vain and passing, Solomon elevates above everything grasped by sense the loving movement of our soul towards invisible beauty," that is, the doctrine contained in the Song of Songs (J.22).
4. For a discussion on this three fold division, cf. **Platonisme et Theologie Mystique**, pp.17-26. Louis Bouyer comments on this division--"We cannot, without distorting the texts, make the succession of light, cloud, and darkness with Gregory coincide with the three divisions of Origen." **The Spirituality of the New Testament and the Fathers** (New York and Tournai, 1963) pp.355-56. Compare with these words what Danielou says further on (**Platonisme**, p.185): "La theoria est donc en un sens un accomplissement, comme l'apatheia en etait un sur le plan de la praktike theoria [Origen's first step which is equivalent to Proverbs], mais pour autant elle n'est pas un terme. Et c'est ice que l'originalite de Gregoire de Nysee apparait le plus, et qu'on peut voir en lui le vrai fondateur de la theologie mystique. Sa grade idee, en effet, est que, meme pour l'ame parvenue a la theoria--qu'il integre--'ousia divine rest encore infiniment inaccessible."

5. With regard to the sensible world as a means to the invisible world, cf. Hubertus Drobner, **Die Drei Tage Zwischen dem Tod und der Auferstehung Unseres Herrn Jesus Christus** (Leiden, 1982), p.163: "Dahinter steht Gregors Theorie die geistlichen Sinne, eine Idee, die auf Origenes zurückgeht: alle körperlichen Sinne analog auch im seelischen Bereich vorhanden. (Cf. Ecclesiastes, J.357). Die aromata der Menschen sind ihre Tugenden (aretai) wobei 'Glaube und reines Gewissen' die 'grundlegenden Lebensausserungen des Leibes der Kirche' sind. Also, cf. the **Song Commentary**, J.419.

6. With regard to the passage from J.359-60 Monique Alexandre observes, "La vision de Paul que Gregoire commente en termes de contemplation du Beau, comme en termes de vision du Tabernacle, est retour au Paradis de la Genese, elle est le modele du retour paradisique obtenu par l'ascese et particulierement la virginite, par la contemplation, elle est anticipation du Paradis de l'apres-mort, de la resurrection." Taken from Protologie et Eschatologie chez Gregoire de Nysse in **Arche e Telos, L'Anthropologia di Oregene e di Gregorio di Nissa** (Milan 1981), p.159, footnote #189.

7. With reference to J.420: "Aussi, la connaissance du vrai bien lui devient-elle difficile. Cette tragique situation initiale, a laquelle les psychologues anciens et modernes n'ont jamais donne une importance suffisante, joue chez Gregoire un role primordial. C'est elle qui commande toute sa conception de la servitude psychologique individuelle et collective." Jerome Gaith, **La Conception de la Liberte chez Gregoire de Nysse** (Paris, 1953) p.119.

8. "Only one [aspect of man's existence] is concerned with the present while the other looks for that which abides forever. Since a great difference exists between mortal and immortal, temporal and eternal, Ecclesiastes urges us not to dwell upon this sensible, non-existent and insubstantial life in comparison to true life." (J.284)

9. David Balas, **Metousia Theou: Man's Participation in God's Perfections according to Saint Gregory of Nyssa** (Rome, 1966), pp.90-1.

10. Cf. **De Anima et Resurrectione**, PG#46.28A; **Oratio Catarchetica**, PG#45.80D.

11. "Alle Teile des Ganzen [members of Christ's body] sind potentiell in die Wirkung im ersten Teil eingeschlossen...Dieses Modelle, das Gregor aus dem paulinischen Gleichnis des 'Erstlings' und 'Teiges' durch die Hinzufügung des philosophischen Terminus te dunamei entwickelt hat, benutzt er, weil er es aus seiner Sicht für geeignet hält, zur Darstellung

der Ökonomie. So sehr die Konnaturalität oder Homogenität Christi und der Menschen in realem Sinne der Ermöglichungsgrund der Erlösung aller zu sein scheint, so kann doch nicht behauptet werden, dass er sich die Leibwerdung als ein physisches Geschehen...dass Christus in physische Gemeinschaft mit dem als ein Wirkzusammenhang aufgefassten Menschheitsganzen trat." Reinhard Hubner, **Die Einheit des Leibes Christi bei Gregor von Nyssa** (Leiden, 1974), p.113.

12. For a reference, cf. Gregory of Nyssa's **On Perfection**: "There is one pure nature in Christ, and it is the same in the person participating in it. However, one springs up while the other being a part of it, is drawn from the fountain and brings beauty to his life in thoughts. As a result, the hidden man conforms with the manifest when life concurs and is conformed to thoughts activated according to Christ." (J.212)

13. Cf. **Die Einheit des Leibes Christi bei Gregor von Nyssa**, p.33. Hubner's book studies Gregory's conception of the body of Christ in relation to the Church and creation including the sources which came to bear upon his conclusions.

14. For a fuller definition of this term, cf. **A Patristic Greek Lexicon** by G. Lampe (Oxford, 1961), p.599-601. The Stoic notion of hegemonikon as situated in the heart has biblical roots as pointed out by Hubertus Drobner in **Die drei Tage zwischen Tod und Auferstehung unseres Herrn Jesus Christus**, p.86: Job 5.13; Is 19.11, 29.14; Rom 1.22; 1Cor 1.19, 3.19.

15. Akolouthia plays a major role in the thought of Gregory of Nyssa. It has strong Aristotelian overtones and can be used variously as order, sequence, arrangement. For a thorough treatment of this word in Gregory's thought, refer to **L'Etre et le Temps chez Gregoire de Nysse** by Jean Danielou (Leiden 1970). Danielou translates akolouthia as "enchainement des idées" (p.18), "la suite" (p.42), "une suite nécessaire" (p.44), "le lien nécessaire de deux propositions" (p.45).

16. "Das Ganzheitsdenken Gregors, das die sinnliche und übersinnliche Welt als große Einheit empfindet und auch zu einer anderen Wertung des Fleisches führt, korrigiert nämlich die alexandrinische Konzeption." **Gregor von Nyssa als Mystiker** by Walther Volker (Wiesbaden, 1955), p.284.

17. "Hier [regarding the Incarnation of Christ] aber wird eine andere Grundlehre Gregors wesentlich...die Lehre von der ontologischen, ja physischen Einheit der Menschennatur. Nach Gregor ist der eigentliche Träger des Gottesbildes nicht die Einzelseele, sondern die eine, einzige Menschennatur, von der die individuellen Menschen nur Ausdruck und

Darstellung sind." **Gregor von Nyssa, Der versiegelte Quelle** (Salzburg/Leipzig, 1939), p.30-31. Refer Balthasar's remarks to Gregory's treatise on First Corinthians 15:28: "To have God means nothing else than to be united with him. Unity then means to be one body with him as Paul states, for all who are joined to the one body of Christ by participation [dia tes metousias] are one body with him. When the good pervades everything, then the entirety of Christ's body will be subject to God's vivifying power [hupotagesetai te zoopoio exousia]." PG#44.1317A.

18. For a brief discussion on the Stoic terms used by Gregory, refer to **Traite de la Virginite**, Source Cretiennes, #119 (Paris, 1966), pp.103-5.

19. Gregory relates this Stoic concept of dunamis with dough or leaven (phurama to swell or grow, but only with an end (peras) in view. Cf. Hubner's remarks: "Er [Gregory] interpretiert te dunamei im Sinne der stoischen Entwicklungsdynamis (Prinzip, Keimkraft), die sich auf dem Wege der konsequenten und gesetzmässigen Entfaltung bis zu ihrem Endstadium befindet. Das übernommene Schema: aparche-te dunamei-phurama hat also folgende Umformung erfahren: arche-te dunamei (akolouthia)-peras: das Endstadium (Auferstehung des 'Breis') ist keimhaft und in seiner konsequenten Entwicklung angelegt im Anfang (der Auferstehung des 'Erstlings') enthalten." **Die Einheit des Leibes Christi bei Gregor von Nyssa**, p.161.

20. "Hier gibt Gregor, den Sinn des zur Rede stehenden Wortes Eccl.3,6 freilich sehr überdehnend, eine auf Kosmologie sich grunende Theologie in nuce. Der Hintergrund dieser Argumentation ist der Beweis e creatione createm; aber hier geht Gregor nicht von der Schönheit und der Sinnhaftigkeit der Welt aus, sondern es findet ein ontologischer Beweisgang statt: Das All tendiert dahin, zusammenzubleiben--suneches estin. Die Kohäsionskraft--sunapheia--die aus dem All ein Eines macht, ist die dominierende Kraft. Und diese Kraft ist nicht als eine mechanisch werkende Grosse zu denken; ihr Wesen wird erläutert durch Termini wie harmonia und sumphnoia." **Gregor von Nyssa und Die Philosophie** by Dorrie, Altenburger and Schramm (Leiden, 1977), p.35.

21. On the Stoic influence of Poseidonios on Gregory of Nyssa, cf. **Poseidonios und die Jüdisch-christliche Genesisexegese** (Leipzig, 1914), pp.112-256.

22. Ontologie und Terminologie bei Gregor von Nyssa, from **Gregor von Nyssa und die Philosophie**, Dorrie, Altenburger, Schramm (Leiden, 1976), pp.108-19. This article has a German title but is in English.

23. "Si Gregoire insiste tant sur cette notion de transcendence, c'est qu'elle est, selon lui, synonyme et de l'absolu inconditionnel et de la plenitude une et indivise, et qu'elle exprime la triple liberte: psychologique, morale et metaphysique." **La Conception de la Liberte chez Gregoire de Nysse**, p.29.

24. Ibid, p.119.

25. With regard to this original blessed state and the resurrection, Monique Alexandre remarks, "Par la resurrection du Christ, par la resurrection des morts, l'humanite accede de nouveau a une certaine view angelique, l'isaggelie du texte de Luc sur la resurrection: des anges, elle a, on l'a vu, l'apathie, c'est-a-dire la vie hors de la mortalite, de la sexualite, et encore la vie de purete hors du peche et des passions, la stabilite incorruptible, et cette nourriture des anges, Dieu seul-tous traits qu'anticipent dans la vie virginale les ascetes." Protologie et Eschatologie chez Gregoire de Nysse in **Arche et Telos: L'Anthropologie di Origene e di Gregorio di Nissa**, p.155.

26. **Die Einheit des Leibes Christi bei Gregor von Nyssa**, pp.126-27. The point which concerned Gregory of Nyssa regarding Apollinarios was his teaching that Christ's flesh pre-existed and that the Spirit is none other than man (cf. p.130-31). Gregory's concept of the lost sheep has its roots in Origen and Irenaeus. For a detailed account of these sources, refer to footnote #127 on page 127. Regarding sheep, Hubner remarks on p.129, "Gregor...bedeutet probaton, das ursprunglich die reine Geistigkeit der gleichberechtigt zum Engel-Pleroma zählenden Menschheit anzeigte, die konkrete irdisch sinnliche Natur der Menschheit."

27. **Presence et Pensee** (Paris 1943), p.26.

28. With these two passages in mind from the **Song Commentary**, refer to a passage from Gregory's treatise on ICor 15.28: "He who is in the Father and has lived with men accomplishes intercession. Christ unites all mankind to himself, and to the Father through himself...having united himself to us, he who is in the Father effects our union [sunapheia] with this very same Father" (PG#44.1320B). Here we have an expression of the total extension of the divine leaven in the entire mass of the dough. Cf. **Adversus Apollinarem**, PG#45.1152C: "through that primacy [of Christ] the entire mass [phurama] of our human nature is sanctified."

29. For further information on this angelic state, cf. **Platonisme et Theologie Mystique** by Jean Danielou, chapter two of part two, "La Cite des Anges," pp.152-82 (Paris 1943).

30. "The **Life of Moses** has the form of a logos, that is, a formal treatise, dealing with 'Perfection in Virtue.'" **Gregory of Nyssa: The Life of Moses**, translated by Malherbe and Ferguson (New York 1978), p.3. **Moses**, like Gregory's other treatises, rigorously stresses the need for a Christian to be virtuous. It prepares us to ascend the mystical mountain of God's habitation (cf. J.157-58).

31. "Il est manifeste que la Ville Homelie sur l'Ecclesiaste procede d'une facon presque exclusivement dialectique: c'est une analyse philosophique des conditions de la connaissance qui aboutit logiquement a reconnaitre la transcendence Divine." **L'Image de Dieu chez Saint Gregoire de Nysse**, (Paris 1951), p.32.

32. This theme of hiliggia is transformed into inebriation (methe) as we find in the **Song Commentary**: "All inebriation makes the mind overcome with wine go into ecstasy. Therefore, what the Song enjoins becomes a reality by that divine food and drink of the Gospel; as then and always, this food and drink contains a constant change and ecstasy from a worse to a better condition" (J.308-9).

33. Gregory begins the First Homily of his **Song Commentary** along the same lines: "Those of you who have stripped off the old man with his deeds and desires...and have wrapped yourselves by the purity of your lives in the bright garments of the Lord which he displayed upon the mount of transfiguration...Enter the inner chamber of the chaste bridegroom and clothe yourselves with the white garments of pure, chaste thoughts" (J.14-15). In this mature work of Gregory we have a unity of three themes: the need for moral purity, the transcendent mountain of the Divinity and the mystical chamber of the bridegroom.

34. This linear direction of a person's advancement may be summed up in a passage from the **Song Commentary**: "[The bride] once again in the archer's hands became an arrow directed at the target of truth by the hands of the powerful bowman" (J.138).

35. When we engage in theology, we use our faculty of epinoia, a concept difficult to render into English. Henri Crouzel defines this term as "La signification fondamentale du premier est celle de vue de l'esprit, de maniere humaine de considerer les choses, en insistant souvent sur l'aspect artificiel que cela comporte." **Origene et la "Connaissance Mystique"** (Toulouse 1959), p.389.

36. "It is clear that the Greek word epektasis is very suitable to express the double aspect of the soul's progress. On the one hand, there is a certain contact with God, a real participation, a divinization (Greek epi: 'at' or 'towards'). The soul is, in a true sense, transformed into the

divine; it truly participates in the Spirit, the pneuma. But God at the same time remains constantly beyond, and the soul must always go out of itself (Greek ek: 'out of')--or, rather, it must continually go beyond the stage it has reached to make a further discovery." **From Glory to Glory**, edited by J. Danielou and H. Musurillo (New York 1961), p.59.

37. Regarding this title, the **Song Commentary** says, "Now let us enter the Holy of holies, the Song of Songs. In the expression 'Holy of Holies' we are taught a certain superabundance and exaggeration of holiness. Through the title 'Song of Songs' the noble text also promises to teach us the mystery of mysteries." (J.26)

38. These "times": are not simply random periods in the space-time continuum but are true occasions for growth. The biblical term for this kind of time is kairos or eukairos which may be better translated as "opportunity." Cf. **Ecclesiastes**, J.373: "Everything has a time and season under the sun...The preceding sections condemn man's fruitless pursuit of vanity, and we are now shown the good which we must look upon."

39. With regard to the human heart as seat of man's soul, cf. **Ecclesiastes**, J.440: "For our benefit God put into our hearts everything he made in eternity that we might contemplate their Creator by reason of their greatness and beauty." Here is a unity between God, man, and the created realm located within the human heart.

40. Von Balthasar remarks on this active role of soul/mirror: "Mais ce n'est pas un miroir passif qui ne recevrait qu'extérieurement l'empreinte, c'est un miroir libre et vivant." **Presence et Pensee**, p.86.

41. All scriptural and references, brief notes, etc, within the translation are enclosed by brackets; those phrases and sentences enclosed within parentheses are by Gregory of Nyssa as indicated within the critical text.

